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FLOWERS AND ELEPHANTS

INCLUDING

LOTUS AND PYRAMID

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FLOWERS AND ELEPHANTS

INCLUDING

LOTUS AND PYRAMID

by

CONSTANCE SITWELL

WITH A FOREWORD BY

E. M. FORSTER

LONDON

JONATHAN CAPE 30 BEDFORD SQUARE

FLOWERS AND ELEPHANTS was published in February 1927, and LOTUS AND PYRAMID in December 1928. As these two books were considered to be similar in style and in subject matter, it was decided to include them in THE TRAVELLERS' LIBRARY as one volume.

FIRST ISSUED IN THE TRAVELLERS' LIBRARY 1929

1863

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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FOREWORD

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A FLOWER from the tree of life was given to Adam and Eve when they were expelled from Paradise. It had no magic force, it was only a flower which had not ripened into fruit and the bestowal of immortality, they could not eat of it. Still, it was all they had to remind them of their garden, and as they wandered over the earth, engendering the future emotions of mankind, they gazed at it through tear-blurred eyes. Sometimes it seemed to them merely a flower; beautiful, valuable, unique, but no more: and from that vision was born what we in our modern jargon call the 'Western point of view.' To the Westerner, be he artist or merchant, a flower is usually a flower, an elephant is an elephant, and a diamond a diamond; objects to the Westerner remain real and separable: they can be understood and described, they can be possessed or sold. But at other times Adam and Eve saw their flower differently. Its petals swelled, it became heavy and grey, and behold! it had expanded into an elephant. Or it shrank and shone, and lo! it was a diamond. These

changes in its nature increased their sadness, for they did not know which of the changes would be permanent. And from their doubt was born what we now call the 'Indian point of view'; to the Indian nothing is real and nothing is separable: elephants and flowers and diamonds all blend and are part of the veil of illusion which severs unhappy mortals from the truth.

These two views, the Western versus the Indian, practical versus mystic, by no means complete our spiritual inheritance. Our forefathers had a third vision. At certain moments their flower seemed a flower as far as it went, and the elephant as far as he went was an elephant, but nothing went far enough. Things were separate, they were real, but oh so imperfect; they had not their full essence, they only contained hints. At what did they hint? At God? Not directly. Each suggested its own absent perfection – that is all that one could say. The flower said, 'There is the topmost blossom on the tree of life, unspoiled by human fingers.' The elephant said, 'There is a huge and happy beast in the jungles of Eden whom men shall never humiliate or trap.' The diamond said, 'There is a jewel beyond price and

greed, safe in the treasure-house of the Father.' Plato was one of the inheritors of this third vision and the writer of this book has inherited it also. She possesses it, not as a system or a philosophy, but as a gift. To her, as to Plato, the world is real – as far as it goes; it is as she sets it forth in her simple and profound prologue: a marriage feast to which the bridegroom has not yet come. 'I will be the bridegroom!' cry the gallant Englishmen. Poor young fellows, how can they be? They can no more involve her in their certainties than she can involve them in her dream.

It is necessary to emphasize this aspect of Mrs. Sitwell's book, for the reason that it is not at all the book it seems to be. Misled by its unpretentiousness, the careless reader will mistake it for the travel impressions of a young lady who went to stop with her brother in India, where she had one or two proposals of marriage which she declined. Our heroine visits Bombay and the Taj, she includes Ceylon, she attends Brigade Sports and an elephant drive, she peeps at maharajahs and bazaars and idles in clubs, she sympathetically repels the attentions of elderly men. She is charming. How well one knows it all! But the book is

not like that. An indwelling spirit informs it, and the colour of a sea voyage, the vivid touches of oriental life, the clever snatches of talk, are bound together and heightened by that contest between perfection and imperfection which runs through all the Platonic vision. Life is at one moment so exquisite and near, at the next worthless and remote. Despondency and happiness succeed each other as swiftly as the motions of a parrot's wing, and happiness is more probable in solitude. So the girl strives to be alone, not – as some women – in order that she may enhance her attractiveness, but in order that she may achieve her vision. At the end, when she is home again, and the marvels and disquiets of her Indian tour are composing themselves, she finds hope and peace: 'I knew there was permanence: I felt reality. I shall find them, I said to myself, the flowers and jungles and innocent huge beasts. I shall find them where the pattern of these things eternally dwells.'

Mrs. Sitwell has known India well, and has filled her pages with many vivid little pictures, and with sounds and scents. But it is the thread on which her impressions are strung that has fascinated me, a thread so delicate and rare that the

least clumsiness in definition will snap it. While trying to write this Foreword I have indeed felt like that 'thick middle-aged man who was generally very active and lively,' and who leant over the steamer rail by her side and expected to acquire her soul in the course of five minutes. My excuse is that I may have hinted to the discriminating reader what not to look for in *Flowers and Elephants*. It is not a young lady's portfolio of travel sketches. Still less is it a love story.

E. M. FORSTER

FLOWERS AND ELEPHANTS

★

CHAPTER ONE

*

EVERYTHING was heightened for me that day – the earth soaked with colour, and my thoughts steeped in emotion. Perhaps it was the idea of going away for some time and leaving it all that made me think I had never seen the slopes and glades of the park look more beautiful. It was afternoon, a sunny autumn veil hung over everything. The massed woods in the distance were rich russet and blue; the beeches rose in the chill and shining air, their fiery leaves burning fierce-coloured in the last rays of the sun. They held their sweeping boughs of orange and yellow high poised across the way, and below lay spread the bright copper carpet of their leaves. Between the smoothness of their trunks the road wound along, and on the short grass all round the fallow-deer vaguely, lightly wandered.

The hollows and little valleys in the park were brimming up with bluish mist; above them the house, long and grey, stood at the top of the hill. I drove slowly up to it, loath to leave this still outside world that smelt of autumn leaves and

damp freshness; but it was growing dark, the deer in front of the house were half lost in the dusk.

A footman stood by the great door of the hall, looking out. We were all collecting there for a dress-rehearsal of the little play that was to be acted for the village people at Christmas. But we scarcely thought of that now, we were so interested in each other and in the fun of meeting. I was to be the village bride in the play. As I came in the footman told me that the others had arrived already, and were changing for the rehearsal that was to be after tea.

The hall lost its height in dim shadows at the top; I went alone up the white stone stairs leading to the shining passages and galleries. There was a big fire burning in my room, the curtains and the counterpane of the high canopied bed were silk of a lovely blue, and on it was spread a froth of white muslin and lace – my play-bridal dress. It was a Victorian dress of billowy flounces; a lace veil hung over a chair, and on the floor beside it were old satin shoes with big rosettes. The room was lit by candles only, its corners were all in shadow, but the polished furniture and bed-posts caught the leaping light of the fire, and the blue silk gleamed.

I changed, dressing very carefully, and then went across to the long glass to look. It was very quiet in the room. I saw myself all white against the dark background and suddenly I was filled with an odd foreboding. In our play the bridegroom never appeared. The bride was foolish, constantly changing her mind; the bridegroom, always on the point of coming, was never actually seen; and, as I stood there, I had a superstitious feeling that this play was a forecast of what would happen to me in my own life. I seemed to lose all sense of where I was, and felt all at once as though I stood inside a globe and saw the wheel of time turning. I saw myself starting off to travel about the world, going from place to place in a sort of dream, people passing vaguely, but no one staying clearly in my mind, and when I got round the circle I was again alone. 'Well, never mind,' I said to myself, 'the earth is full of lovely things, and I shall see them – rivers and temples and exotic flowers! Perhaps I shall wear those flowers,' I went on in a confused fashion, 'instead of any bridal wreath, and perhaps I shall like them just as well!'

I tried to shake myself clear of these thoughts,

but when I went downstairs again I felt clouded and hesitant, as though I were going to meet some dimly-felt crisis. The house might have been empty it was so noiseless. In my white clothes I went along the polished echoing passages as softly as a ghost until I reached the library door. Standing there, I could hear the voices inside, and the sound of the tea-cups and the people laughing.

I still felt as though I were half in the future, and paused for some time with my hand on the door-handle before turning it and going in. The long room, lit by lamps, was filled by the big party who were having tea. Lamplight and fire-light fell warm on the orange curtains hanging in thick folds over the tall windows, and shone on the gilt lettering of the books that lined all the walls of the room. Under one of the lamps was a large bunch of dahlias; smoky crimson, deep red, and marvellous tawny yellow. There were three or four tables of tea-things, with the party clustering round them; they were all dressed up in rich old clothes, dark blue and claret and brown; the scene reminded me of some dusky picture by a Venetian painter.

The heavy door shut softly behind me, and I stood there unnoticed, looking at them all laughing and talking. Jack was standing at the far end of the room getting some tea. I saw him directly I came in; and he saw me. His eyes dwelt on mine with a sort of surprise, as though some new thing were dawning on him against his will. We stared at each other across the others, each of us gazing as if at a stranger. It was no more than a moment really, I suppose, but it seemed a long time.

His head stood out distinctly against the book-lined wall – his hard young face, with its rather dissipated and dare-devil look that went oddly with the quietness of his eyes, set widely apart. Again he made me feel as though I were a ghost, and I moved uneasily towards the others, who at last noticed me; and then Margaret called out: 'The Bride! Here she is! – Oh, isn't she a Kate Greenaway bride!' Then they all turned round and looked at me, and someone began clapping. As I walked across to a sofa, I felt a little dazed, and my hands trembled so I could hardly hold the cup of tea that Jack brought me. He gave me a wondering look, took the cup from me again, and put it on the table near by. After this he

went across to the fireplace and lit a cigarette. I talked to Margaret a little while, then Jack came back.

'Are you excited at the thought of going out to India?'

'I never really like any change,' I answered. 'I hate to think of life passing and changing. There is so much. . . . I can't even keep pace with the ordinary life of every day, and all the fun.'

'You sound like the child in that poem of Coleridge's, who "always finds and never seeks," ' he said, and then, as I remained silent, with a little laugh he went on: 'Things fall, you know, into quite another pattern in India.'

'But I like the pattern of things here,' I murmured.

He asked me of our plans, and I told him that the people I was to travel with were almost strangers; but that when I arrived I would stay with my brother, who had been away in the East for three years now. Jack's manner still made me feel a little shy, but I said at the end:

'And I suppose I shall see you, too, out there?'

'You will –' he assented, 'unless the regiment is moved; or unless there is a war; or unless I am

dead. But – oh, you'll make plenty of new friends.'

'Anyhow,' I answered, smiling, 'you are part of the life I'm used to; and that is what I like. We have known each other for a good many years now, haven't we?'

'Yes,' he said, and turned away to stare into the fire.

After this there was a silence, and other people came and talked; but later on – after the play was over – Jack approached me again and said:

'I feel that you are a different person this evening, dressed up in those things! You have become different, almost grown-up, for once.'

'Don't you like it – the dress?' I asked – 'this dear old muslin spread round in frills? I feel like a story-book person in it.'

'Oh, yes, it's lovely,' he agreed. 'But you are like a story-book person – always.' I thought his voice had a certain bitterness.

'Well! what harm is there in that?'

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Fairy-stories are not very satisfying. However,' he went on, 'even princesses in fairy-stories fall in love – sooner or later.'

I laughed and said as lightly as I could, 'Well, for this princess it will be later – much later – if ever at all.'

His voice hardened as he replied: 'You can't have *everything* your own way in this world. But you haven't learnt that yet, have you? You manage to live in a world of your own making; it's too much of a dream altogether.'

'It's a happy world, anyhow,' I retorted, 'and that is something.'

'May it continue!' said he; 'but remember that other people have to come into it who may not be so happy – and who may want more,' he finished shortly.

He threw his cigarette into the fire and held out his hand to say good-bye. His face had a look of impatience on it, and although the little play had gone off very well and I was feeling quite exhilarated, my sense of foreboding returned. I could not help wondering whether I was right to live in my own world, and be so happy.

CHAPTER TWO

*

I CAN hear the swish of the sea now as I write and the quiet noise of the waves on each side of the ship as we go so very smoothly along through the Gulf of Suez. If one listens one can hear and feel the pulse and vibration of the engines, though very faintly. It is the luncheon hour; I am almost alone on deck. There are some Lascars rolling up the awnings in front of me; their bare feet clench the railings on which they stand; the lithe figures in fluttering indigo and their bare brown legs are dark against the sparkling sea.

I do want, while I travel, to write of the unforgettable little spaces of time that come when imagination is merged into living in a special way, and the thing seen becomes like a work of art, intense, significant, separate. They come suddenly, these perfect moments of perfect life, and they remain with me for ever. If of all the places that lie before me I can see even one in that way I shall think of it as mine, mine – safe in my secret world.

We reached Suez before the sun rose to-day. I

got up very early; the morning sparkled – the sea shimmering the palest green and blue; and Suez lay, just a low line of ochre and lilac buildings, along the yellowish shore. In the cool air lovely bird-like boats, painted green, with pointed white sails came sailing near and about us. The huddled figures in them seemed to have been there all night, so immobile were they; while one steered the others sat, with blue cloths shrouding them, silently looking across the water. Some of the boats brought slippery fish, some dates crushed into blocks, some fruit piled high. It was very quiet. All the colour was cool, clear and light, there were no dark shadows; and I walked about the wet, washed decks by myself, so happily.

But when the sun rose everything altered suddenly, and lost the quality of dream: the men in the boats bestirred themselves and began talking; other passengers appears, Lascars ran pattering about the ship with their hard, light tread, the houses on shore shone white with deep shadows, and more boats came rowing out towards us; boats full of boys, brown and black, clothed in a few wisps, who sang and grinned with white teeth, and rowed slowly round the ship, their faces

upturned while they shouted their guttural Arabic to one another. The boats bobbed about jauntily on the sunny little waves that lapped the steep side of the ship. In one of them sat a blue-black Nubian youth with a bit of pink stuff knotted round his head; his gleaming body looked polished in its blackness against the pale water as he sprawled there idly with a parrot perched on his shoulder.

And now we are passing by the ridged coast of Arabia, where the cobalt and amethyst ledges curve against the vacant sky so sharply that the mountains might be cut sapphires flawed with deeper azure.

Most of the life on a ship is ordinary enough between the meals that heavily divide the day. I have plenty of time to think of all the new places I shall see. I think too of Jack; I think of him with a sort of fear, for again he will make me feel that I am too indefinite. He wants to break into my dreams, and I still love my own world in which I must be alone. For when I am not alone those miraculous moments never come to me, solitary moments lit with what must surely be a kind of insight and made permanent by their complete-

ness. All other things belong to time and so quickly pass away.

And yet it is actually through Jack's mind that I see some places, little though I want to. Port Said, for instance, that rubbish heap! We got there at night when the lighthouse was waving its swords of light in large sweeps about the sky; and later on we landed. There was no traffic in the white road, deep in dust; the unreal-looking houses stuck up abruptly out of the sand. There is no noise of feet there, only the bead-sellers' chatter and the plump pallid shopmen talking at their open doors.

We went to a jaded-looking café in a colonnade, and sat at one of the little marble tables to drink coffee. A bright white light from strong lamps fell on the big-leaved dry plants in tubs below, all powdered with white dust, and on the parched road, and on an acrobat in silver tights, who stood on his head and walked on his hands up and down the untidy street. The light glittered on his waving silver legs and stiff arms, and near by there lounged a dingy Dago band playing frail tunes. A sallow little girl in a dirty pink dress stood in the harshest glare singing mechanically in a worn

voice; all the squalor, all the sordidness, of the place seemed embodied in that poor little creature, so sleepless and unwashed. Jack loaths Port Said, I thought. And no wonder! How smirched everything is there! But I am not sure that most things don't look rather hard and arid seen through his cold eyes.

Never mind! all that has been blown away by the wind now. I stood in the bows of the ship in the evening as we went down the Canal after coaling at Port Said. The sun had set over the desert, leaving a saffron and daffodil sky of curious flatness, with rosy clouds flung across it. I could just hear a gramophone playing on deck for the people to dance to, but the desert was tense with the unmistakable silence of the East.

After a while one of the passengers, a thick middle-aged man, who was generally very active and lively, came up and leant on the rail at my side. It was bright moonlight; the white paint of the ship had a silvery look, even the ropes sloping high above us seemed of twisted silver. There were stars, too, in spite of the moon, and cool serenity, but a hot wind blew strongly between the high peace of sky and limitless sand. Its force was tre-

mendous; I had to cling to my pale silk skirts, and the bit of gauze around my head blew round and round high above me.

'Won't you come back to the main deck,' said he, 'where the wind is not so strong?'

I hesitated; not only do people dislike solitude for themselves, I thought, but they seem to dislike it for others as well. I answered that I liked standing here where it was quiet and thinking of the desert stretching away and away into Africa.

He smiled, as if he thought this rather a joke.

He would have thought it still more of a joke, I suppose, if I had told him what I was imagining: miles of colourless sand lying pale under the moon, and sand-coloured lions moving; and fields of blue vetch by the Nile; and the black tombs of the bulls of Apis, dark and stifling under their load of sand – thick heat in there, and thick darkness, and the empty sombre passages going between the great black granite tombs, sunk deep in underground halls. And fields of beans, and fields of lupins and loose-growing sugar-cane and dense corn; and behind, the rosy wall of the Libyan mountains in the jocund morning light, honeycombed with tombs – full of mummies in hard

painted cases; and painted halls and creamy passages, and roofs coloured with the young blue of Egypt – the most adorable colour in the world.

'Come and dance on deck,' he said cheerfully. 'That's what you should be doing at your time of life.'

I think he felt it was a duty to rouse me from melancholy thoughts; and I couldn't see how to undeceive him. At last rather stupidly I said: 'Did you see the lilac jelly-fish this morning? And the sea-snakes diving amongst them?'

'No,' he answered, laughing and staring. And his stare seemed to say: 'You're a queer girl certainly. But you'll change all right as you grow older; you'll find ordinary things are the best in the end – and the good old ordinary way of living.'

We stood silent for a little; the bright light of the ship fell on the low banks of the Canal, and on a man, hooded like a monk, who sat in a little boat moored by the side: he had lighted a small fire in his boat and was sitting motionless watching a cooking-pot, not even glancing up at the high sides of the ship as it glided, all lit and towering, by.

'He seems as self-absorbed as I am,' I said, pointing to the lonely crouching figure.

I laughed, but my companion looked a little cross and walked off, whilst I also felt a little cross at being thought foolish and sentimental.

'How delicious it is to be alone!' I said to myself stubbornly, and quoted Emily Brontë:

'I'll walk where my own nature will be leading,
It vexes me to choose another guide.'

Some of the crew were sitting about in the fo'c'sle talking lazily and singing scraps of songs. I looked up at the mast with the dull orange light at its tip moving smoothly along amid the maze of twinkling stars. The warm wind blowing across Africa made the ropes hum and blew my hair about. Moonlight flooded all the wide expanse. And dreamily I thought again of the morning's amazing sight, for as I was looking over the ship's side into the sun-filled purity of clear blue water, I saw it starred with thousands, with countless multitudes, of jelly-fish. Floating there in the fields of the sea, all misty lilac, half transparent and half opaque, swayed this way and that in the limpid waves, they moved gently, seeming tranced by the

slow motion. Tremulous, with filaments of palest mauve spreading round them and wavering in the warm sea, they stretched as far as eye could see right down into the translucent blue.

And then as I looked I suddenly saw, plunging deeply amongst the soft nebulous forms, two glistening sea-snakes. Shining emerald they were; swift and twisting they seemed to reel downwards to the depths. I felt that I was looking into a world of life too remote, too strange, too fantastic, and I looked no longer, half afraid that some still greater marvel would appear.

CHAPTER THREE

★

After the jangling noise of Bombay, with its vivid shifting crowds that pour down every street; after its confused mixed life and the confused pungent scents that trail about; after the wondrous evening light there that gathers itself together and seems to splash everything with ruddy gold, here, where everything has the unfamiliar note of Central Asia, we seem to be on the very bones of the world – rocky spines and ribs of flint and granite.

Through the winter the bones have been naked, stark and massive except for a few severe lines of snow down the sides of the mountains. So now that the spring has come, and this world is putting on some coverings, we feel them really to be embroidery and bright ornaments. First come the grape hyacinths, standing stiffly, little blue armies of them, amongst the trees. Then the apricots and almonds, tossing their blossoms in the wind, curiously fragile looking with the steely mountains for a background. And then we saw the desert ground being covered more and more

thickly with twisted leaves, and from them rose slender yellow tulips. The mountains too brought forth living things: the long trains of camels passing through the brown defiles have a look as of giving out amber light; the black and white sheep seem more distinct, more vigorous yet. There is more of a lilt in the walk of these Mongolian beggars, dressed in dirty pink rags.

Yes, the passionate wind of the spring blows here too – more poignantly even than in England. It is so very short-lived, this Eastern spring! See how quickly the flowers are shrivelling up! The soft breathing and blowing makes one catch one's breath at men's transitoriness. The sense of that nearly withered me yesterday – more humble and fleeting than ever I feel.

We had ridden out of the town into a wide valley with dun and ochre hills all round. The others had gone forward to see a gorge farther on, so I sat by a rock and waited for them while the dusk fell. All about were pitched the tents of travelling tribes, who are shepherds. Their tents are black, or striped black and brown. They looked so sudden on the pale ground. In this place is no abiding home for men – only the black

tents, and on all sides the moving masses of sheep – cream-coloured blotches on the earth. The shepherds were calling them together to fold them in from the wolves and jackals. Children herded the lambs, carrying green branches in their hands; the little lambs were amazingly white, but there were some with black markings. The shepherds' voices calling filled that still brown valley, and the sheep answered bleating. The evening was full of the bleating of sheep, and the weaker bleating of lambs. I said to myself this coarse grass that I have picked is the same as grew in the time of David, also a shepherd boy; these same sounds that I am hearing fell on the ears of Esau in his rough clothing; and perhaps Abel, a keeper of sheep, heard just this calling on his last evening on earth. The rock I am leaning against is still hot from the sun that has beaten on it all day, just as it was at this hour a thousand years ago.

Is this the sort of rock that Jacob slept on, I wondered, when it had cooled in the night? I wish an angel would appear now – flaming pointed wings against that peaked mountain behind.

How lovely the solitude was – sort of ecstasy to me, like Blake's 'eternity in an hour'. Amazing

skies seen alone! And as the sense of loneliness deepens all things become symbolic – the bent head of the shepherd; the boy playing his pipe by the smooth stones of the stream – timeless and ageless they appear.

One of the first things I saw after we arrived here was a wedding procession. We were driving through a bit of country where the ground was white with asphodel. The pale flowers were lit up like thistle-down by the low rays of the sun; they glistened like desert foam. Leagues of them – so light and white; legions of ghosts of flowers it seemed; and through them came the wedding procession. It was led by a man in a brown coat with squares of vivid orange let in, like a dancer in a Russian ballet; and then came a camel bearing the bride in a palanquin. The whole erection was covered with a pale lilac curtain. I couldn't see the bride; it looked as if she were a caged bird being carried slowly away. Behind her there was noise and gaiety – a line of black oxen with weather-stained pink cloths thrown over them, and ridden by women in the heaviest, most gorgeous colours – unrelieved crimson and blue and red. Can you see how definite, how sensual they looked in that

shimmering expanse of white, and how the short steps of the oxen went after the slow swinging of the high camel? At the end of the little party were donkeys with yellow bundles slung across their backs, and some young men beating tom-toms. The young men were beautiful, all in white, with dark long hair and beards; they smiled at us as they passed. I hoped the helpless bride was to be given to someone like them.

How unexpected are the things here! – the men sit in their shops and drink, out of brightly-coloured Russian china, tea made in samovars. The animals are herded by men in sheep-skins. Thibetan holy men, in stained and faded rags, wander about, often smiling in an idiotic, happy way. Their broad, dirty faces are made for smiling, surely. The shops are piled up with rugs from Bokhara, and soft cat-skins and fox-skins. The air is very keen and crystal clear; the plane trees, white against those sapphire mountains streaked with shadows, make an avenue straight up the chief street of the Bazaar. The first time we went along it I stopped suddenly where the coppersmiths were hammering, for I saw, set along a low wooden form, a row of pots painted pale red, and

in them cyclamen. My heart was caught up with delight. Dear cyclamen, I thought – dear mixture of lilac and red; you feel so much my own, I must throw a greeting to you in this strange place.

One day the lady doctor at the Mission Hospital asked me to go with her to see some Persian women. They were of high family and in purdah, so four or five doors had to be unbarred and opened before we got into the bright courtyard. At one end there was a wide verandah with an old vine growing heavily over it, and on a rug in the sun sat a group of Persian women and girls: the old grandmother, and her son's wife, and his son's wives – two girls of about fifteen and sixteen. They were all very courteous and serene. Slim and wide-eyed, they stood up when we arrived, and though I couldn't understand a word they said, we smiled at each other quite happily. The girls had straight black fringes under gold caps, which were wrapped round with stiff white gauze. They wore full white trousers and coats of blue and white striped silk. Their faces looked radiant – one possessed a baby boy, who clung to her gauzy veil, hiding his face in it. Adorable little creature, with his round embroidered cap and small coat of

grape-coloured velvet. In his fat hand he gripped a jade bracelet he had pulled off her arm. There was hardly any furniture in the house – practically nothing but a low table with a threadbare silk rug thrown over it, and a pan of charcoal burning. It all seemed very peaceful and poetic to me, and I half envied them their seclusion.

Coming through the Bazaar that evening, each shop seemed a separate work of art set in its own frame. In front of the fruit-seller, the grain-seller, in front of the shops for velvet waistcoats, and the dyers with their huge cauldrons simmering in front, were put jars of vermilion tulips – sometimes a row of bunches of red tulips. Glowing beauty of men and flowers! You look so alive and fierce-feeling, you men in skins and velvet! – it seems a good symbol of you, that scarlet, arrogant tulip.

Not many weeks later everything was parched and hot, and then suddenly, one afternoon, there was a storm – a rain-storm, thunder-storm, dust-storm and sand-storm – all in one. Great clouds of dust circled up into the air and thunder rolled in the middle of the murk of flying sand; darker it grew and darker; and then, all at once, there was a

turbulent muddy river streaming across the desert from the hills. In the evening the rain stopped, the air was moist and cool, and how washed and wet all the roads looked.

We went down to the Fruit Market. There were purple clouds piled up behind the mountains, and only a few rays of stormy sunshine broke through. The covered market was full of yellow and green melons, some of which were split, showing the rosy flesh inside; men were sitting in a circle amongst them, talking and eating; on one side was a group of huge fat-tailed sheep. The last rays of the sun fell on the piled-up fruit, the huge sheep, and the men in their rough yellow skin jackets. One of the sheep near me had an orange cross marked on its back, and a necklet of forget-me-not blue beads shone in the white woolliness of its neck. It was eating a yellow melon and a boy was feeding some others with the split pink bits. I stood still – not thinking – soaked in the stormy and gorgeous colour of it all – gazing at the masses of rounded fruits and feeling the rough vigour of the Baluchis and Pathans as they strode about the market. Then all at once my eyes fell on another (a very different) figure, just as big and vigorous,

it is true, but so different, and there, to my surprise, was a man who had been on the ship with us – a Canadian. He too had just seen me, and after a moment he came up in his rather lumbering, awkward way and said he guessed travelling on the same ship was good enough for an introduction out here. I answered, laughing, that I guessed it was, and added that since then I had come across one of his books. He was staying in the place for a few weeks more, he said, in order to study the various tribes scattered about in the district.

During the next three weeks I saw quite as much of him as I wanted. For I didn't really like him. To begin with he was heavy and clumsy to look at, no movement of his had any precision or grace, and then he was heavy and clumsy, too, in mind. But he did have some power, and I couldn't ignore it. I met him at dinners and dances, or at the Club if we went there. He used to talk and talk, and I couldn't help listening. Perhaps it was only my imagination that made me think he was trying to get some hold over my mind, and that I was trying to escape. When he was sitting there, with his brooding look upon me, and I listened to

his oddly penetrating talk, I felt it wanted a real effort on my part to shake free again. I don't know what he asked of me quite; probably not much, but I was afraid of being disturbed in the world of my own imagination and of being taken into the other stranger world of his mind. He asked me later on why I had avoided him on board; he had watched me and wanted to talk to me, he said, because, forsooth, my 'face was so luminous!' And now he wanted to come for walks with me because with me 'things appeared fresh' to him.

Ungainly he was, and uneasy, but he had dignity. He gave me the impression of standing completely by himself in life. He didn't belong to any particular class, and in this country where everybody has his place he seemed extraordinarily independent and detached.

The thing I most enjoyed while his presence hung over me was the native horse show and races; and perhaps what helped me to enjoy that was the thought that my companion was to leave on the evening of the same day. The show was quite an exciting one. The natives had put on their strength and donned their most beautiful garments; and never were a people who wore more

satisfying clothes – broad stripes and checks and little rough coats, more rich in colour and design than any we are able to turn out.

There was a great crowd on the race-course – Pathans, Hazaras, and people from Khandahar; a crowd of horses, children, women, many of them on asses, camels with decorated saddles, bullocks with crimson and blue saddle-cloths. Peaked caps, white trousers and velvet coats swarmed everywhere, and amongst them were English soldiers. Up in the poplar trees shone gold caps and the gold lace on coats; camels' heads peered over the thick crowd at the railing, and some of the men managed to get a view by standing on bullocks' backs as if they were tables.

The course was very indifferently kept; not only did wrestlers perform there but the native band (which had an encounter with the military band and vanquished it) sat in the middle of the grass, only moving when the race started, and going back again afterwards to finish its playing of 'Mahmoud of Ghazni' or 'Zokhmi Dil' (The Wounded Heart), on painted, twanging instruments. One of the most amusing events was a race for zemindars; they started as hard as ever

they could, so as to make a good impression when going past the thick of the crowd, then eased down, and only put on pace again when they came back before a full audience. They rode without stirrups, nor did they wear jackets – but just big blue or olive green trousers and perhaps a crimson silk handkerchief tied round their dark heads. As they dashed along they waved their arms; their turbans, if they had any, flew out behind, and they shouted continuously. Then there was tent-pegging, followed by feats of horsemanship; slim Pathans stood up on galloping horses, jumping off and on again as they careered along. The camels that were competing had been ornamented with blue beads and quantities of red tassels. During the race the cushions and tassels fell off, and the rest of their decorations streamed out in the wind. Before the finish some of the camels left the course, disappearing altogether in spite of their frantic riders, while all the crowd yelled. Finally, as the sun set, most of the onlookers swarmed on to the course, spreading white cloths over the grass upon which they said their prayers.

We waited till the end. The Canadian stood by me while the rest of the party was collecting itself.

'I won't forget you,' he said. 'You don't much care to be with me; I know that. You see how well I understand.'

And I, looking into his grave face, knew that he was more of my own kind than anyone else there. He had not caught me, he did not hold me captive, but we could meet, as I then saw, in some region of the mind where the others did not enter.

'Well, you see,' I said at last, 'although I seem dreamy, I like gaiety – I like to be laughing. I don't want – other things.'

'Yes, you are rather frightened – and perhaps rather spoilt,' he answered, half smiling. 'But I should have left you what you are – a child.'

I met his gaze and knew he was right, and I suddenly felt terribly ashamed of my faintness of heart.

'Look at all those people,' he went on, 'going home by different roads, and praying. We all go different ways about the earth – and to heaven too. For, of course,' he added, 'religion is the only real thing anywhere.'

The sun was setting and down the dusty roads the crowd streamed away – children on oxen, superb young men on horses with long tails, whole

families, just bundles of red and brown and yellow, borne aloft on camels. The pointed hills, which had flushed to an unsubstantial apricot and peach colour, now paled again and were chill and slaty.

'Some time I'll write to you,' said the Canadian. 'Good-bye.'

We have now reached the month of May. All day the naked sun burns on till nearly eight in the evening. I went into the garden just now to see if there were ripe figs on the trees, but it was too hot to stay there. I must wait till sundown. It is better to sit indoors and gaze out through the vibrating air at the mountains that stand between us and the sea. Soon we shall go across the plain and beyond it, and this place will be no more than a series of pictures in my mind – vivid in patches, but with hardly any personal connection. For this land still remains alien to me – dramatically distant. Any one of these strange Asiatic faces, looked at deeply, sets one so far away.

Yesterday evening I went out to buy some Bagdad silk, and I felt that even the suffering I met upon the way could hardly touch me, so remote did it seem. But oh, the beauty of those

narrow streets! Covered over for the sake of shade, they are rather dark, but how they glow with colour! In this season, before all the shops, instead of tulips, there are jars of tightly bunched pink roses – the chill pink rose of Persia. And some pots of geraniums. I walked slowly, for it was still very hot. One man, young and strong, was selling drinks, all of bright colours in glass bottles, and the stoppers to the bottles were made of magenta paper, sprayed out. Behind him hung an embroidered purple curtain, worked all over with little white flowers. His eyes were large and grey and he wore a dark blue turban, in the side of which was stuck a bunch of white roses. Cross-legged and serene he sat on the counter, with his thick curly hair falling over his shoulders and his row of nosegays in front. He sat there so quietly, and opposite him on the other side of the road was an old beggar woman crouching against a mud wall. Like Lazarus she was covered with sores, her dusty matted head was bent almost to the ground. She was grey with dust and dirt and there were no dogs to lick her sores. I gave her a little money and stood there vaguely looking at my crisp muslin dress against that heap of rags. The

white dress, the white roses, the white embroidery on the silk curtain, my scented soft handkerchief – how fresh and sweet they all were! And how helpless I was beside this misery! I glanced up the shaded street, and the young man looked rather scornfully at me. 'Only a beggar! – Only a woman!' he seemed to say.– 'Your strength is no good for this,' I answered, half out loud. 'If only the young Christ could pass this way and she could touch the hem of His garment!'

CHAPTER FOUR

★

THIS garden is a green gloom in a sandy plain; outside its walls lies the sun-baked little town. I am writing on a long verandah flecked with sunlight. Close in front of me, like a medieval Italian design, convolvuluses are growing; they are trained straight upwards round the wooden posts of the verandah; among pale, heart-shaped leaves their velvet-streaked, frail flowers – all opening widely to the sun – are transparently, brilliantly blue and purple and magenta. Beyond, far away, are pointed mountains, faint in this fierce light. We have come for a few days to the desert land on the borders of Afghanistan and Persia. How dreary these Eastern countries seem if one thinks one has to stay in them for long! And can they ever be intimate or homelike to anyone, these barren Eastern houses? I wonder. But perhaps this garden one could love – this garden with its monster vines that shade curling paths, and all its almond trees thick with green almonds, and its dark-leaved quinces. I found a tortoise on a path one evening,

but it hissed at me when I touched its horny back.

In one part of the garden convicts are at work. They seem happy; anyhow, they laugh a good deal, and it is only occasionally one hears the chink of chains. This morning I watched them spading up the hard soil; robust and vigorous they look, pressing the spade down with strong feet shod in pointed slippers. One of them has a waistcoat of peach-coloured velvet embroidered with white, another has a worn orange-coloured coat and a scarlet cap, but most of them are in white from head to foot and wear stiff gold caps from beneath which their curly hair hangs down.

We had to come over a high mountain pass to get here, and then through desert. At first it was bare but not fantastic country; we met quantities of flocks and herds that were being driven in from the south – white and black sheep with their lambs, goats and bleating kids, strings of camels led by shaggy-looking men and women who strode along gaunt-limbed and strong. Then, as the country changed, I kept saying to myself that this must be what the moon looks like or some lifeless star, for the landscape had indeed a most

unearthly appearance – low ranges of arid hills with strata of many-coloured rock set abruptly at every angle, skeletons bare of flesh, their edges sharp against the burning sky. Scattered about were heaps of clay of every shape and hue; they looked like gigantic anthills or growths of some monstrous fungus. They gave the impression, too, of being poisonous, as though they had only a hard outer crust and were porous and rotten inside. What a fabulous look they gave to the scene! The pale green and pink and white mounds curling and spreading themselves about – a dwelling-place for slow dragons surely. The ground was baked hard; the fiery sky was like a blue tin lid laid over the earth, and there were no clouds to 'cool the cheek of the day'. As we rode through the hot little defiles the light seemed to make the rocks vibrate. By the time we were nearing the end of our journey I was very tired – too tired to look at the camels ploughing, or at the men clad in full white trousers and crimson waistcoats, who were working the dusty soil. Nothing could kindle my delight any longer – not even the faces and gilt caps of the running children, dressed like little princes and princesses, whom we met on the out-

skirts of the straggling town. I could do no more than stare vaguely before me as we rode down the long straight avenues of poplars with irises growing thickly beneath them. At last we came within sight of our destination. Far off we saw the high mud wall enclosing this garden, and the tops of the trees showing above the wall. How restful it was when we got there! The garden was cut up by narrow paths winding among the apricot and almond trees and leading to small shady secret places. In the centre was a patch of darker shade made by a cluster of mulberry trees. The birds were singing loudly everywhere; the big petals of the quince blossoms gleamed ivory white in the dusk, and beyond along the far horizon stretched the pale jagged mountains of Persia.

It was too hot and the glare was too great for us to go out in the middle of the day, but the next afternoon we were to pay a formal visit to the Tribal Chief of the district who lived in a fort in the middle of the town. Walking through the narrow dusty streets I wondered if anywhere else in the world were shops that glowed as splendidly as the silk shops here. Their sudden splendour! The sparseness and dryness of the colour outside

made all the more violent the richness of the piled-up silks within – the green like parrots' wings seen in sunlight, the deep blue as of iris or gentian, shades of pink and orange as vivid as nasturtium petals. There were silks like a flame, silks of pure rose colour, silks of magenta and gold and purple. The man who kept the principal shop was a refugee from Kabul. His lined thin face was half smiling; he had criss-cross marks on his legs where the red-hot irons had been laid when he was in prison there. He showed us skins as well as silks; soft snow-leopard skins were lying about everywhere; he had, too, painted lutes and painted chests and boxes. His boy was in the dim back part of the shop, leaning against the bright rolls of silk. Dressed in a short coat of dull yellow leather, he stood there, apparently dreaming, and high on a shelf above him was a striped bottle in which had been stuck a bunch of polyanthus.

The fort was built, it seemed, of clay and stones. It had been swept and made clean for this visit, and the people had put on their finest clothes. We were taken through a courtyard to a tower, and then up some stairs to a bare, light room where the Chief was sitting waiting for us. He was an

oldish man and burly, with a short curling black beard and a broad face. While the others talked about taxes and irrigation and fighting, I sat there silent. Before us was a table laden with melons, long white Kabuli grapes, apples from Kulu, and the sticky sweetmeats of the country. A few flowers in a tiny jar seemed to be aware of their own inconsequence just as I was. For I was the only woman there, and as the men went on talking I lost all heart and took no comfort even from the tea which was offered in gaily patterned Russian cups.

When this was over we climbed yet higher up the tower of yellowish clay and looked down from the roof over the country lying still in the faint rosiness of the sunset light. All along the roads were high hedges of loose pink roses. The dense blue-green of the crops ended abruptly where the water supply stopped. Long wavering lines of camels trooped towards the town, looking just the same colour as the sand they were treading on; a bevy of women, swathed up like bundles in their robes of weathered pink and red, rode in on slow-moving oxen. It was beautiful – I knew it was beautiful; but oh, the harshness of it! In my faint-hearted mood I saw everywhere signs of struggle

and fight: no blade would grow here without water laboured for under the blazing sun; no sheep or goat could live here without the fear of wolf or jackal; no traveller was safe from robbers, no woman from man; no one could even ride at his ease because of the rents and chasms in the sun-baked ground. 'Yes, even the roses,' I said to myself, 'are plucked and crushed, when at their freshest, for the scent they will yield. And no trees anywhere except the trembling poplar! How dreadful to live in a country without trees! – O dear rich trees of England, standing about in the soft fields for no reason except that you are beautiful and beloved!'

It seemed from what I heard that the Chieftain of the Province was a monster rather than a human being. Cruel and treacherous, he lived in his squalid palace above the low town, with a hoard of treasure hidden in his cellars underneath. This treasure, they said, was guarded by a swarm of black snakes that lived in the darkness below. The thought of that man filled me with a horror of all this country. I hated him with his debased face, his filed and pointed teeth, his diseased palace-horses that were never taken out, his dirty

zoo of wild animals, cramped in small cages against the hot palace wall. As I looked around from the tower a sudden anguished longing and love for England dimmed my eyes and veiled the clear-cut view. I longed passionately for the tender landscape of home, for the views continually changing under changeful skies, for the soft falls of friendly rain, for the fragrance of summer evenings. I thought of the air, breathing of the honeysuckle that grows over the uneven hedges and of the smell of lilac still dewy in the morning. I thought of ash trees in the winter stillness, shaped like branching coral; I remembered flat elder blossoms spread motionless in the heat of summer suns, and weeping-willows like green rain, and rivers and water-weeds. I remembered the smell of water-weeds, pulled dripping from their streams, the freshest, coolest scent of all. I remembered, too, drifts of damp fallen beech leaves – all these things became real to me in a moment on that tower so many thousand miles away.

CHAPTER FIVE

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THESE cantonments in northern India are all one colour – not the tawny colour of the desert, but just dry dust-colour. Now, as I write in the hot hour before luncheon, there is a light dust-storm passing along outside, making the soft white road still softer and thicker with dust, and the dry trees with their rattling leaves more colourless still. Horsemen go along the road occasionally, and soldiers constantly; native cavalry have been passing by, and now in the middle of the dust-storm go the mule transport and one or two camels. The men are trying to keep the dust out of their eyes – the camels are never concerned with anything that happens, always bored and always half resentful.

I love this bit of life. I love my little white-washed room and the thick bunch of orange blossom on the dressing-table; I have a vase, too, full of the big lilac flower that looks like butterflies with their wings outspread.

How new it all is! Soldiering mixed with hunting is practically the whole life of those I am with

now. Nearly every one rides – every one English that is to say, and every one seems to be the same sort of age. There are no old people here, and scarcely any children, but there are crowds of young men who are always ready to lend one ponies, or to arrange rides on elephants, or drive one home from the polo in their dog-carts. And I – even I! – have become sporting. I hadn't been here two days before I was made to hunt. My brother Richard, whom I have now joined, had got a pony for me; and still feeling slightly bewildered I started off with him before dawn for that first day's meet.

It was in the cool starlight that we set out. We crowded into a carriage with another girl and an unknown man belonging to some native cavalry regiment, who dozed in a corner. I looked out of the window and felt the chill air and saw the stars pale before the dawn; I thought of India stretching away to the snows and to its tropic seas, and the others began to sing sleepily songs that they had heard at regimental concerts. After a while we reached a bridge over a canal and saw a ring of horses standing, and a ring of muffled syces hunched round a fire that they had lighted on the

ground to keep warm by. We got out stiffly and mounted; then voices were heard and we saw the shadowy hounds coming along the canal bank and behind them more people riding. But how quickly after dawn the day grew hot and glaring! We had a long run that morning. We jumped endless ditches and banks, and at last they killed the jackal they were hunting, with its cowed and pointed face. It looked so thin compared to the hounds.

My pony, which had never been hunted before, was quite untrained. At last it pulled and curveted about so much that I got off, and Richard led it and his own across the hot red plain, while I walked beside him jumping the little ditches clumsily in my long boots. How heavy my habit seemed! How dusty and thick! My feet ached. But India was new enough to keep me very excited. It was so strange to be walking through Indian fields. To stretch out one's hand and pick cotton glistening in woolly pods! I saw some trees with heavy vultures clustered on them; vultures always look old and ragged, they always droop; their every feather seems to sag, and their nests are old and ragged, too. I saw, too, a striped wild cat

sitting tense on a wall. Eventually, we met our syces again outside the gates of an orange garden where the air was flooded with the scent of orange blossom. A milk-white bullock stood there quietly, and a white-bearded old man, covered with a yellow cloth, sat near it in the shade of the trees thick with yellow-green fruit. He gently replied, 'Salaam, Sahib,' when Richard said 'Salaam, Buddha' (old man), to him.

We bought some tangerines from a wayside seller who was squatting with a sulky face under the shadow of that high wall, his pile of sugar-cane and loose-skinned oranges in front of him. Then we hired a little cart, and so drove home, Richard slashing idly at passing bullock carts and sleepy drivers with his long whip.

On our verandah we found some of the others in Richard's regiment who had come to have breakfast with us. Everything was strange, including having breakfast with all those boisterous subalterns.

In the weeks that followed, Richard and I went out riding on most of the days that we didn't hunt. Early in the morning the Indian 'Boy' would come and wake me, putting a tray down by

my side, and I, leaving it sleepily till the last moment, would jump up and dress when I heard the Boy come again to the door and knock. 'That master ready, missie,' he says. Then I hear the horses being led round outside, and catching up my long gloves and the little riding whip Richard had given me, I go out into the cool. We ride through the Gunners' stables with all the buckets set outside, and through the mud lines where the native women live. There are little clouds of dust where the Gunners are drilling; their khaki uniform is just the colour of the cantonment soil.

But I like best going to that square tank, dark and hidden with the mango trees around it; in the early morning there are generally some Brahmans doing their ceremonial washing there. One can see the sacred cord across their wet bodies. They scarcely glance at us, our worlds are, indeed, too far apart to merge, even for a moment, into one. A Fakir lives near by, too; he has a solitary little enclosure of his own, but he is not a bit gloomy nor abstracted; he is ready to laugh when Richard speaks to him. A dark red cloth is thrown over his strong shoulders, the thick hair falls round his

fine rugged face; in those rough garments, perhaps John the Baptist looked like him.

In the evening all the English repair to the Club, where a band plays. We dance – the men in white flannels or polo kit and the women in habits or tennis clothes. At one end stands a refreshment bar where you get coffee and little plates of potato chips and grain called gram. After playing polo, the men come in, and after riding one stops there. A crowd is always standing on the broad steps in front, talking, smoking, listening to the band, while the crows flap about among the trees on the grass maidan in front, and the syces wait squatting by the dog-carts or horses, while the darkness falls.

And then came the evening when I saw Jack ride up. Hardly waiting for his man to run and take his pony, he walked straight in. The confused sound of dancing, the band playing and noisy talking, made an intricate pattern through which I heard his odd hard voice – curiously distinct – saying to someone that he had just come down from Simla. Richard was already dancing heavily in his riding boots. Someone brought me a cup of coffee. I felt suddenly tired. I knew that now

Jack would try and draw me out of my own world of imagination. He came and stood in front of me, half smiling, but saying nothing. The lilting tune swung on; the couples passing and repassing on the shining floor made me feel dazed. 'Come,' he said. I shook my head. 'But of course, you're going to dance – you're going to dance with me.'

Richard was playing polo the next day, so Jack came for me in his car and we packed a tea-basket and drove off by ourselves. He was a little changed, his face burnt brown by the Indian sun; but his jerky voice woke the old thrill. We drove over the shaking bridge of boats; the river was so low that only two boats of the long line floated. Buffaloes stood knee-deep in the mud along the bank, mud-coloured creatures standing torpid, motionless in the sun. Then we turned down a palm-bordered track with the green crops of the Punjab stretching away on every side. We hardly met anyone on the way – only an old man carrying his hookah, and a dimpled little boy holding a stick followed by a herd of goats and brown sheep. With a laughing face, the boy led his flock along the track speckled by sun and shadow, and after him came a tinier boy, a naked gold-brown

cherub, one rounded arm over the shaggy neck of an old goat, like a creature in some sylvan legend. We stopped near a group of trees that were full of parrots constantly flying out in a whirring cloud and then settling again. The green trees were thick with green wings and loud twitterings.

The car was left in the middle of the road – for there was no traffic here – and we unpacked our tea-basket, spreading the things on the grass in the shade. The spirit lamp leaked and the light flickering flame ran along the ground, burning up the shrivelled grass. Jack thought it would catch my old silk dress, but I wouldn't move – no movement seemed worth while, sitting there so peacefully in the warm afternoon. He lay on the ground smoking.

The magical evening light that is almost too rich, too spectacular, turned the thick half-grown wheat to prussian blue, and light veils of blue mist began to rise above the crops as the sun sank down. The dome of the great mosque far off stood clear against the sky that turned from gold to smoky Indian yellow. Quiet figures in dusty scarlet or dusty crimson moved homeward along the little field paths. It was time for us to go, too.

Some lean sheep passing by, their poor fleeces gilded by the light, ate up the skins of our oranges. As I got up, the light breeze of evening blew my scarf over Jack's arm; he caught it and looked up, smiling. 'No, I'm not going to let go,' he said. 'I've got hold of a bit of you at last, flimsy though it be.'

We hardly spoke as we drove home in the cooling air. With Jack, who had been so much a part of home, I was more conscious than ever of the mysterious alien life around us. As we passed under the deep shade of the big banyan trees at the gateway of the Moghul garden, two sadhus were standing there, and for garments they had nothing but the thick ashes with which they were sprinkled. They had put down their begging-bowls and lighted a fire on the worn bit of ground under the trees. They stood and looked at us aloofly, leaning on their thick sticks. With hard, bony legs and matted hair, how unnatural those blue-grey bodies seemed; most sinister! My spirits sank as I looked at them. 'They despise us all, I suppose,' I thought as we went by; 'they certainly despise me, who am a woman.'

CHAPTER SIX

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RICHARD and Jack had been asked by a Maharajah whom they had met playing polo to come and stay with him for a day or two in the capital of his remote, sandy State. It was arranged that I should accompany them, and never shall I forget the long night and day journey to get there. The train window had to be kept shut, for the sand blew in and stifled us if the least crack was left open. So there was nothing for it but to do without air, and we lay panting on the leather seats through the melting heat of noonday. Thank heaven, we had oranges, pomegranates and Cape gooseberries to eat, and some figs in a little green basket made of fig leaves.

At last we arrived. An amiable man in Shantung silk and long ear-rings met us at the station. It was his duty, he said, to telephone to His Highness 'to inform him of our safe arrival'. This done, we drove down the sandy roads of the ochre-coloured city – long roads full of swaying camels, with groups of women at the crossways, going to the well before darkness came down.

Farther on, in the streets and open places, were set big tables, polished and dark, and on them men sat cross-legged, smoking hookahs and talking. They looked supremely comfortable, those circles of white-clothed, bearded men sitting upon the tables.

On every side of the town the desert stretched away into lilac as far as one could see. Only a few scrubby trees and bushes of spiky camel-thorn grew there, and everywhere the clumsy wild pigs routed snuffling about with coarse manes growing half-way down their backs. Nothing in the desert but wild pig and sand-grouse, I was told; yet one morning early I did see a tiny deer bounding over the parched red earth.

The next afternoon we drove to the polo ground, which was all of sand too. One saw the dust in clouds and the whirling ponies in the middle of it. Richard, who was playing, found it very difficult to see the ball with all the flying sand, but he played as violently as ever, his sun-hat on the back of his head, his face very red, his white shirt fluttering. I thrilled with excitement as the players thundered past, the turbans of the Nobles streaming out behind, whilst they shouted in Hindustani or, more often, in English.

The Maharajah was very fond of his white Arab ponies, which had white saddles; between each chukker he gave them a handful of grass and came and praised them to us in his charming voice. A band in the yellow uniform of the State played at intervals, and after the game was over a man came round distributing tight formal bunches of flowers. Out on that dusty ground how fresh those flowers smelt!

That evening we were to dine at the Palace. Dressed up in our best, we drove off by moonlight in a large barouche painted with an enormous coat-of-arms. Two men sat before us in front and two more stood behind. After passing through the high outer gates we drew up before the huge front of the Palace with its flag flying above it. An Englishman in white uniform met us on the steps and led us through a hall of yellow marble out into a courtyard open to the sky. There we waited until at last, when I was almost dazed by the silvery whiteness of the moon shining on the smooth white walls, the young Maharajah appeared, himself all in white, against the darkness of a black archway. With us at dinner there were some of his cousins – slim, lithe young men with

straight features. They wore gorgeous tight-fitting coats, and their gallant air made the scene look like one out of a fairy-tale. Men in vermilion livery waited upon us. It took three of them to hand round all the trays of ingredients for the curry. Our surprise as tray followed tray amused the Maharajah, who advised us what to take and what to avoid, some of the mixtures being so very hot. While he talked to me about England and about polo at Hurlingham, Richard and his neighbour became very animated and friendly over pig-sticking.

When the meal was over I was taken along many corridors and up a flight of stairs to the apartments of the Maharanee. The men, of course, remained below, so we were without an interpreter, and as neither knew the other's language we could do little more than smile at each other. We did a great deal of smiling in the course of that little call. The Maharanee's plump face was young and mild, with blackened eyes and heavy ear-rings. She wore a peach-coloured sari worked with silk and an imposing necklace of uncut emeralds and pearls. A musical-box was turned on for my entertainment, and then a stuffed canary

was made to twitter mechanically in a gilt cage. Before I went away some rather moist sweetmeats and a syrupy beverage were handed round by a fat woman hung with jewels. I didn't care much about their amusements nor their sweetmeats, but I did envy them their clothes, and longed to be dressed in that Indian dress of rich modest grace. I envied them their beautiful tradition of clothes that goes on century after century unchanged.

When I came down again to join the others, the Maharajah asked if we would care to go up on to the high roof-terrace and look down on the country round about instead of playing bridge. So we mounted the broad steps, pale beneath the moon. The town, which had a rather savage aspect by day, lay far below us, austere and calm. Nothing stirred anywhere. Sharp and clear in the bright light were the pallid houses, with wooden camel saddles hanging up by their doors; the flat roofs and thick mud walls broken by black shafts of black shadow.

I walked across the roof to look out over the other side, and on the ledge of the balustrade there lay a young dove, dead, with tiny clenched feet. I looked wonderingly at the utter quietness of it, the

soft neck lying back, the peaceful head on one side – like a child asleep – the bright eyes closed, all so relaxed, so soft-feathered. When I turned again the men were leaning against the trellised wall, smoking and laughing over some joke. With the deep far blue of the sky beyond them how amazingly vital they looked! Supple figures in shot green and gold, in pale shimmering blue and white, and on their heads high turbans of crimson and turquoise. The moonlight glittered upon them; and there too were Richard and Jack, distinct in their severe evening clothes; the Maharajah had his hand on Jack's shoulder and they were all talking eagerly. My mind went back to the dove, and it seemed impossible to me that any of those active living shapes should ever grow old or die.

A Hindu feast was observed the next day, the ceremony consisting in carrying a goddess to a distant well and there worshipping her; but none except Hindus would be allowed to come near. Our host, who was taking part in the ritual, sent one of his A.D.C.'s to look after us and take us to the Fort, from which we were to see the procession start. Within the walls lived the aunts and great-

aunts and women relations of the reigning Prince, with two hundred more women to wait on them and bring them the gossip of the bazaars. The A.D.C. looked very smart in white muslin, with shining long boots and spurs and a rainbow turban, the long ends of which hung down his back. A little cane in his hand, he walked lightly along, leading us to the terrace from which we looked down into courtyards and arcades. The sweltering courtyards were already crowded with women, their necks, arms and feet weighted thickly with bracelets and jewels, besides which they wore nose-rings, toe-rings and ear-rings in abundance. More and more densely did the people press and crowd in, perching themselves like flaming birds on the walls, on the roofs, and on the polished bronze cannons.

Very soon the different regiments marched up with flying pennons and passed with the band into the main courtyard, where the Maharajah's elephant was waiting, its shadow huge against the whitewashed wall. Then down the empty road from the Palace there came a light green car. It was the Maharajah, and with him was his wife, hidden behind silken curtains. But there was still

some time to wait before the procession made a start and began to wind through the gateway below us. First came the soldiers, led by their band, then a bevy of rather coarse-looking dancing girls. These were followed by men beating great gongs slung from their shoulders, and they beat them with such vehemence that the din, harsh like the naked glare, was absolutely stupefying. And now came the goddess. She was carried high in the middle of a horde of singing women with covered faces – a grotesque little figure hung with garlands. All around her, like bees, the women swarmed – in ruby and magenta, rose, striped orange and gold. Behind the goddess came the Maharajah and his little boy, riding a massive elephant. They sat on golden seats shaped like birds; the elephant was hung with supple cloth of silver which shimmered and shone in the sun. Its head was adorned with stiff aigrettes of emerald and crystal, and its ropes were crimson and red. The Maharajah and his son were dressed alike in soft white; the light flashed on the diamond ornament fastened in front of his big turban and on the smaller ornament of his boy.

They came slowly through the high gateway

and all the people pressed round salaaming and shouting, 'Rao Sahib! Rao Sahib!' As he passed, he looked up at us and waved his hand and smiled. Behind his elephant came another, also caparisoned in silver, with a rider in turquoise satin and pearls. And then followed the tail of the procession – dancing horses with harness and head-pieces of real gold and golden bells hanging nearly to the ground; they were gravely led along by tall men in pure vermilion. Last came empty carts with canopies of velvet, for the goddess in case she tired. Upon the horns of the white, meek-headed bullocks that drew them were silver sheaths and on their backs trappings of silver that swung to their slow tread. Like a brilliant snake, the long line dragged itself down the dusty scorching road and disappeared at last into the desert.

Having watched it out of sight, we continued to sit there for a while. How peaceful this terrace was now; how delicious the silence after the shouting of the crowd and the tearing sound of the trumpets. The whole town was wrapped in silence; it seemed that scarcely anyone was left in it. Below me, in the shade, a dusty elephant was

quietly shifting heavy balks of timber; presently a woman came out into a small enclosed garden and shrilly scolded a man who was working there. The man made no answer and she disappeared into the house again. At last we turned to go. Jack, who was anxious to understand the ritual of the feast, put a question to the A.D.C., who replied, smiling, that it would be very difficult to explain. Jack shrugged and said that the longer he stayed in India the less he could understand what we were doing in the country. 'But if it comes to that,' he added after a slight pause, 'what are we doing anywhere?' And the A.D.C., perhaps finding this yet more difficult to explain, replied, still smiling, that 'life was but a candle in the wind'.

CHAPTER SEVEN

★

I WALKED rather timidly along the causeway to where the Temple shone golden and fabulous in the middle of the tank. The coral dawn had already faded, but it was still early in the morning and the tranquil water looked like dull steel. Inside the Temple itself it was chill, but the moving sunlight was just beginning to strike through the open sides and arcades and touch the shining walls; it fell too on the yellow flower-offerings tossed up into a soft mound in the middle.

Pigeons flew about, outside and in; on the ground sat a man swathed in dull blue, just the colour of the pigeons, and their burnished metallic wings were matched by the steel daggers stuck through his blue turban. He sat there, his face expressionless and as motionless as a mask, his eyes fixed in a trance so deep that it seemed as though they could never move again. I gazed at him, keeping almost as quiet as he, and feeling almost as deeply entranced – so still was he in his blue clothes backed by the golden walls and the

golden heap of blossoms, while the blue pigeons fluttered full of movement round him.

Some old musicians sat cross-legged on the floor, making a music that had no end. Occasionally they would burst into a hoarse untidy singing; the singing grew louder, grew fiercer, grew almost frantic, before it suddenly quavered out and the music fell back into its old quietness. What was the meaning of this sudden exultation that bubbled up out of their torpidity? It excited one by its vehement, inexplicable spontaneousness.

Men and women in silks and gauzes began to wander in and out, presenting offerings to the priests, touching the ground with their heads, and doing their ceremonial washing.

And now the whole Temple is swimming in golden light, and we go out and saunter along the marble terraces that run all round the water. Along the broad walks are white figures ranged against the white walls. These are holy men, murmuring blessings on water brought by those who pass by. There are also teachers passively droning or singing in a seemingly half-conscious state, whilst their followers squat round them in rapt

attention. Others sit silent, either looking about or vaguely pondering.

Propped up against a pillar and almost lost in the folds of his salmon-coloured robe, there is an aged man whose eyes show that he has wandered far into some strange world of his own. Near him drowses a baby, huddled up on a heap of rose petals. It is dressed in a tiny coat of sapphire velvet; an embroidered cap, its only other garment, lies on the marble pavement near by.

One of the men with a calm and intelligent face has attracted a large group by persistently tapping a nail against a glass bottle. It is difficult to understand why the people stand watching and waiting without a sign of impatience while the small sound of the tapping goes on and on without end. But it is all so difficult to understand; at last one ceases to wonder, and a mood of acceptance descends over one. In this dream-like place all our ideas of energy and purpose are dissolved into meaninglessness; even Time is dissolved into the ghost of an idea and the Sadhus gathered here are as creatures outside time – as creatures in a state of being that is hardly rippled into life, like the water in the steady tank.

But Richard, who was bored, said he was sure no enlightenment would ever come to him in that way, and asked Jack if he had ever seen a holy man who really looked holy. Jack was silent for a minute, and then he said that once, on his way down from the Hills, he had met a fakir who was travelling to the mountains by measuring his length on the ground all the way up those steep and stony roads. From far off he had watched his slow progress through the lonely country and when he had come near and seen the man's face he was amazed, so peaceful and strong was it, and full of joy.

After a while we moved away; we went into the courtyard behind the Temple, and here everything was different. Here life was fevered and had a nightmare quality. There was a crowd of pilgrims in this place, the smell of the marigolds on the shrines was strong and rank in the air, no breath of wind stirred the heavy atmosphere, and every moment the sun grew hotter and hotter. Wreaths of jasmine, offered for sale in flat baskets, breathed out a dying sweetness; the garlands which had been given to us in the Temple hung round our necks limp and dead. I noticed the people looking

at us with curiosity and felt that a current of hostility was running through them.

This was the resort of the Fakirs. Here were the Fakirs of travellers' tales – misshapen and fanatical men. One had apparently taken a vow not to comb or cut his hair, which, matted thick and high above his head, fell over his eyes which peered through with a feverish glare. Another was leaning against a corner of the wall, and him I imagined to be really mad. He stood there with hardly a wisp of clothing, shouting, and lifting imploring but not unhappy hands. Not far from him another being – nothing but a bag of bones – crouched over a red charcoal fire, while the cruel sun beat down upon his back and head.

My eyes fell next upon a figure seated on the ground with one arm held stiffly upwards. It had been in that position for so long that it had withered and become unbendable. Jack stood in front of the rigid, unnatural creature. I could see the pity in even his aloof regard as he looked at the poor emaciated face. He put some money into the begging bowl by the man and turned away, saying that it seemed an odd road to lead to Heaven.

But we had not yet seen the most grotesque object in the place, the spectacle that attracted the thickest crowd. This was an ash-smeared figure in a tow-coloured wig who lay upon a bed of blunt nails. As he looked round from time to time, I noticed that his face, which was singularly coarse and meaningless, wore a look of great self-satisfaction; and when he saw us among his admirers he was evidently seized with the desire to make himself still more impressive. He fumbled for some time with one hand in a little tin box by the side of his spiky bed. We wondered what could be coming next, and some amongst the crowd apparently knew, for they watched our faces to see the impression made. So long was the interval of preparation that I began to think that nothing more would happen after all; but after a further pause, the man put on, with infinite solemnity, a pair of gold pince-nez and looked round with unconcealed triumph. No one smiled. We stared as if awed, and indeed we were almost awed; for could anything more fantastic have been done? There he lay proudly on his nails, clothed only in ashes, a pale wig, and pince-nez that glittered in the sun.

CHAPTER EIGHT

★

I STOOD leaning against a marble pillar in the shade, gazing idly at the small square garden on the roof of another remote palace. The marble was cool to touch. The arcade, with its white columns, gave shade to all round the little green space; but in the middle the oleanders and pomegranate bushes lifted their creamy and scarlet blossoms to the full heat of noon.

Opposite me two or three turbaned men were lounging in the sunlight. How beautiful they were, against the pale marble background, in their clothes of lilac and amber and faded vermilion. A weight of heat, a brooding stillness, filled the gigantic white palace with a heavy peace.

It was two hours since we had drawn up before the great towered gateway. For two hours Jack and I had followed the others about, rather absently, like children at a show. And now I was tired and stupefied by the heat, like every one else – excepting Jack, who walked restlessly up and down, smoking cigarettes as usual.

We had been first of all into the dusk of the Armoury, a dim place with a high painted ceiling and thin Persian rugs on the stone floor. A row of men, sitting along one side of the room, were making sheaths for swords. The new velvet sheaths, embroidered in gold, lay freshly finished upon the ground; the old ones, frayed purple and tattered scarlet, lay piled up in one corner. In another corner were stacked long painted sticks of gorgeous colours. Hanging on the walls were curved swords and spears that caught the light. Jack lingered to handle the unsheathed weapons, fingering the sharpness of the old worn steel.

From the Armoury we went along shaded passages where scribes sat coyping from ochre-coloured books. Their lined faces were bent downwards; they never looked up at us; their slender fingers went on with the fine writing.

We came out into a court that was filled with the sound of music, and, looking up, we saw a little group of musicians sitting on a balcony singing in the sun. They made a bright jumble of blue turbans and coats pale green and rose; the sunshine glittered on their silver bracelets and toe-rings and ear-rings. They accompanied them-

selves on long lutes and little drums, and vaguely, continuously, their singing rose and fell.

In the court there was perpetual movement. Men came out from dark doors and gateways leading horses with high-pointed saddles and bright bows tied round their legs.

We wandered on. We passed along endless colonnades; we went under endless porticoes where guards, in their old discoloured uniforms, sat torpid along the marble seats, their curved swords laid on the ground beside them. We climbed flight upon flight of age-worn, yellowing stairs, and looking out through the carved tracery of the windows we saw beneath us, far below, the sunny town with its temples, and the lake, a sheet of turquoise, shimmering in the heat.

As the sun mounted the world grew more and more still. Every one seemed to be asleep. Only, far down, on the great terrace – wide enough for the parade of the Maharajah's whole army, elephants and all – a 'dancing-horse,' with a pink velvet cloth thrown over it, was being led up and down. It pranced, and the man in scarlet hung on to the jingling reins; the silver pieces sewn on to its cloth flashed in the sun; the black prancing

shadow of it was sharp upon the ground. It was there for the Maharanee to look at from her windows.

And now Jack and I had reached the somnolent little green world on the roof. Jasmine was climbing up one of the columns, and I said to him that I must have a bunch of it, for jasmine and orange blossom were the two scents I loved best in India. 'Jasmine is an emblem of sorrow. You had better choose orange blossom,' he answered, smiling. But I said that, like Nur Mahal, I had a passion for this Indian jasmine. 'It is entwined all up the walls of her tomb at the Taj,' I added. 'Do you remember? And in the Palace at Agra there are niches in the walls for vases which used to be filled with it.'

He didn't answer; and I went on talking about the Queen's rooms at Agra; of how from the windows one could look out and see the Jumna flowing wide and calm in the cool dawn, and the grey cranes standing on the banks as quiet as the palms; and in the curve of the river lies the Taj, with its domes floating like milky bubbles above it under the rose-flushed sky. I described the forest of slim pillars in the palace, with creepers of jade

and lapis lazuli winding up them – rooms all ivory, set with fragments of onyx and agate – rooms with roses and lilies and irises eternally blooming upon their pale walls.

'If you met someone like Shah Jehan who could give you jasmine whose blossoms were mother-of-pearl and the leaves jade, perhaps then you would be ready to marry?' he said. And he went on: 'It is always the same. You are satisfied to look at the world through your eyes at a distance. You want no other – no *closer* reality.'

I had no answer. He was unhappy – and so was I, really. We left the roof terrace; we went down the innumerable stairs, and went out of the sleepy palace into the thronging streets. As we were driving along we met a wedding procession. First came the band, harsh and crude, followed by dancing girls singing with brassy voices, their full skirts stuck with gold tinsel; their bracelets and garlands and necklaces made up a jangling whirl as they circled and swung around. The slow horses following were almost hidden beneath brass and silver hangings; in the carriages sat children, stiff with silver cloth and stamped velvet. And then came a colossal elephant, an elephant

painted in a formal design of squares, tapestry-green and blue. High on its towering bulk the bridegroom, a little tired boy, sat propped up half asleep, in a tight coat of cloth of gold. His eyes were thickly blackened, his head had sunk forward, the golden tassels of his festal cap fell dangling in front of his brown, babyish face; but he was too tired to care. His attendants waved fans over him; men walking by the elephant carried heart-shaped fans of velvet and peacocks' feathers which they swung to and fro; the crowd gabbled and jostled about him; but he slept on.

In the cool of the evening we had tea in a garden enclosed by trellised walls, where the fresh leaves were very green. On the grass, in sun and shadow, moved peacocks, sapphire and emerald, a glowing troop. Not far off a great cupola rose against the yellowing sky, and in the trees around us the soft, grey monkeys were leaping.

At the far end of the garden, beyond the wall, there was a marshy lake. And as the sun was setting behind the stark hills and the desolate sand, two bare-limbed men stood by the water's edge in the fierce tawny light. They had bits of raw meat

tied on to the end of long ropes. These they threw out as far as they could into the lake, following the flight with wild shouts that went echoing over the turgid water. And at once the stagnant surface was cut on all sides by big mud-coloured heads, and crocodiles came pushing themselves up the bank with their long mouths wide open. How I hated the yellow saw-like mouths and yellow teeth and dragging bodies.

While we were watching a roar shook the darkening air. There, in front of a cage built against a wall, more raw meat was being hacked up. Kites whirled round in the hot sky, swooping down now and again with an arrogant air and carrying bits of the tattered flesh away. Coming nearer, we saw a dusty tiger crouching in a corner of the cage, its flanks sunken in, and swishing its tail from side to side. It had just been trapped in a pit near by. Its yellow eyes burned so hotly that I feared to look at them. The Indian who was with us swaggered up to the cage and drew his hand insolently along it. Instantly the tiger hurled itself forward against the bars, which shook and rattled at its weight. It beat and beat again at the iron with its paws, opening its furious mouth.

Such fierce, such maddened roars poured forth they seemed to tear one's ears and one's heart. There was a sick, almost shamed look upon Jack's face.

Then the tiger began to pace forlornly up and down and the floor of the cage was spattered with blood that came from a deep cut in its foot. We moved away, and I said to myself in a kind of angry revolt: 'Jack has to live in this country – and perhaps he can do something here. But what am I here for? I am not made for this.' And then, suddenly I felt far away. I couldn't recognize myself as the person walking by Jack's side. I was really walking in the soft fields at home – soft wet fields with fragrant feathery hedges.

CHAPTER NINE

★

We were back in the cantonments; four weeks more went by, and then we moved into the city. It was my last day before going up into the hills. All through the warm afternoon I lay on the long wicker-chair in the high whitewashed hotel room, with the packed boxes round me and the bedding all rolled up. Oh, that bare land! I have listened for the last time to the yelping of the jackals at night – that querulous whining bark that rises and dies away so strangely. No more shall I hear the Last Post in the distance, mounting through pain, almost despair, to triumph at its close. The unknown was too close about one there; too keenly one felt the earth driving on through unknown spaces. When the unfamiliar stars blazed out in the evening I was desolate with fear. In a sort of panic I would repeat –

'Be kind to our darkness, O Fashioner dwelling
in light
And feeding the lamps of the sky;

Look down upon this one and let it be sweet
In Thy sight, I pray Thee, to-night –
For this is a world full of sorrow,
For this is a world where we die.'

Light and amusing the life here seemed at first; but as the heat became intenser other things became intenser too – especially that poignant feeling of hazard and mortality. Life there was such a very chance affair. One of our friends, one of the youngest and most light-hearted, was at dinner with us one evening and died the next day.

For me, underneath the fun, there was a curious strain in the life which grew stronger every day. I didn't know how to order my thoughts, or how to choose which way I should go. Here Jack's face looked more reckless than ever, and my mind was troubled, confused and full of pain.

That last afternoon, when we went over to the cantonments for the last time, the pain of the place reached its height. We were to watch the Brigade Sports. When we got to the ground Jack came to meet us, and he stayed with me all the time. We sat side by side, hardly speaking – he, leaning back in his chair, his legs stretched out, his hat tilted

over his eyes, the picture of dejection and utterly bored with the sports. In a dream I saw the men racing with white wet faces, and in between whiles soldiers dressed up as clowns performing antics under the blistering sun. Some men fainted after the obstacle race and fell into the arms of their friends. In a dream I saw the officers riding mules bareback, grotesque in fancy dress. The scarlet coats of the bandsmen seemed heavy with heat; the band blared on in the exhausted air. All the time the same torturing questions were going round and round in my mind. Everything seemed to be crying out: 'You are alien here!' Although Jack said he hated India, he loved it too. There was something harsh and fatalistic in the secret country of his mind that was matched by the India around him.

The men had been running the quarter mile; their faces looked thin and pinched, their hair was wet on their foreheads. The ground felt like a stove. I heard Jack say: 'Would you hate the life very much if you stayed here?' And 'Couldn't you ever like it?' he asked again.

The intensity of the glare and his urgent questioning made everything seem taut and about to

break up. There were the men's strained faces racing, the tight tape at the winning-post, that voice near me sharply edged with pain, and over all the aching sky with no cloud to soften it. My hands were stiff holding my flouncy parasol and I felt fixed and unable to move.

'Couldn't you ever like it?' he said again, so low that I could hardly hear.

The race was over, the tension broke. The soldiers began cheering, the band started to play again. I looked at Jack, trying to smile. 'Come!' he said abruptly; 'your face is as white as your dress. We have had enough of this.'

We got into his car and he drove off; and when he stopped again I realized that we were under the walls of the old Moghul Fort. We walked along the quiet green ditch under those stupendous walls. There was no one there – only green parrots flying over our heads with eager pointed wings. We climbed up and up, high on to one of the crumbling walls, and sat looking down on a bare strip of ground, beyond which was the walled city. It was a Mohammedan holiday and the people were flying kites. From all parts of the city kites rose into the luminous evening air. Curved

like shells, shaped like hearts and diamonds, they were poised in the light of the setting sun, pale, dreamlike, transparent. The children playing on the burnt-up grass beneath us shone like jewels, for they had on their festal clothes, and the little caps and shoes embroidered with gold thread glistened.

We sat watching. Along the broad worn road men and women, donkeys and beggars passed. All the men and boys were flying kites. Remote from life we felt. Our own lives were a dream, like everything else. Hushed sounds from the town were borne up to us. I watched a man sitting on a roof gazing up at his kite; he was as motionless as we were. A boy down below had a big kite of white and crimson, but he couldn't make it fly. We watched him run up and down the path again and again, but the kite would not rise.

The sky was now so bright that it became almost frightening; burning sequences of colour surged up from the west and all the blue above had turned sea-green. Then, suddenly from the grass ditch below, there appeared a black kite, diamond-shaped. It rose with grace – rich, dark,

beautiful. It soared straight up into the wonderful sky. I cried out at the beauty of it. 'That is mine!' I said. And still it soared steadily up, right into the fire of the sunset. Jack followed it with his eyes, smiling rather bitterly. 'Very well! That is yours! And now, which is mine? I must see.' Looking round, he fixed his eyes upon a kite shaped like a scarlet heart. With a laugh he pointed to it. It was fluttering lamely near the ground, too heavy to rise.

A few hours later we were all in the train. The swift Indian night had come. We were to travel together till midnight; then our party would change into another train and Jack would go on by himself. Hour after hour I sat looking out of the window. The parched hot breath of the wind blew in, but made nothing cooler. The moon rose, golden and ample, over the stark hills. It shone on the little huts and palms; on fires built outside village walls, with rings of men sitting round the fiery glow which lit their dark faces and high turbans; on pools and dried-up river beds. It seemed to me that night as though each separate thing became significant of that land – the sight of

a man sweeping with a bunch of peacock's feathers – the sight of a man in yellow strolling along a platform garlanded with pink roses.

At last we drew into our station. Crowds of people thronged it inside and out. They were sitting everywhere, on the hard ground, in clusters and circles, under the bright moonlight, their bundles and brass cooking pots beside them. A little apart, Jack and I gazed silently at the scene. The shadows of the roofs fell sharply on the white bareness of the earth; there was a dense blackness in the shade of the mud walls; beyond there stretched a cactus hedge; polished, it shone like blades of steel in that blue-white brightness. We seemed to be standing in a great silence – a silence so great that the bubbling chatter of the people scarcely disturbed it. All sound and all colour were quieted and chastened by the moonlight. While I was looking I had an experience which I had had once or twice before in my life. That which seemed at one moment a chaos, a shifting kaleidoscope with no design, fell suddenly into perfect order, all its bits slipping into place. A new world opened out, a vast calm settled down on all the little scene, on us, on life. 'It is all one,' I said to

myself. 'The plan – how clear! And how deep the unity!'

I turned, full of peace, to Jack and told him what I felt. 'Don't you, too, ever feel it?' I asked.

He shook his head. 'I see no order. I feel no plan,' he said in his hard voice. 'There's no sort of certitude in anything for me.' His words broke through my peculiar consciousness; the pattern fell to pieces again; the disjointed fragments drifted apart. And we were soon to part now. The night mail which he was to go by came thundering heavily in. We waited on the hot platform while the natives clambered into the crowded carriages, and chattered and screamed for the 'pani-wallah,' the man who carries water in a dripping goat-skin to all the thirsting hands and pots that are thrust through the train windows at every station, day or night.

In the tumult of noise we did not try to speak, and indeed there seemed nothing more for us to say. At last the train began to move and Jack jumped up on to the step, and still he stood on the step as the train went out, with the red lights burning behind; in a few seconds he had slid away into the dark.

CHAPTER TEN

★

RICHARD and I rode our little ponies along a grassy path through the Himalayan forest. Our guide, Rigu, and some hill-men who looked after the ponies came behind. These men have the softest of voices, the very voices for these soft paths, and this soft air breathing warmth and freshness, and the green forest light. The head man looks like one of the Tudor kings and wears a square cap. Occasionally he brings me a handful of ferns and sweet-smelling roots he has collected. He laughs a great deal; Rigu tells us he is a good jester. There are ferns growing everywhere, and sometimes we see grey monkeys swinging from tree to tree.

Yesterday we loitered on the top of a hill where we were having a picnic and had to scramble down the steep slope in the gathering darkness back to our little forest path. The air was like wine. I could not help singing, and Richard, in the hope of stopping me, I suppose, kept on saying there were bears about. In the end it grew so dark that Rigu had to walk in front holding a

white handkerchief out behind him to guide us.

We are on our way to stay with a Hill Rajah in a little town in a fold of the lower ranges of the mountains. But the place where we slept last night is the place of all others where I should like to stay. As we arrived there in the dark, for the time being I could only see that it was a sort of Hansel and Gretchen wooden house that we were to sleep in. It was not till the morning that I realized what a delicious spot it was. It was so silent, so very sunny and smooth – all moss and fragrance and little streams, a warm grassy cup in the heart of the towering forest, and the great mountains rising around. As I stood on the wooden verandah and looked about, I saw tufts of smoke curling up from charcoal-burners' huts hidden among the pointed trees, and the fresh scent of deodar logs was wafted across to me. 'The earth *is* sweet,' I said to myself, 'and who could want more than this?'

A little later some villagers came to us in the verandah and said there was a bear near by that had been spoiling their crops and stealing the little apricots from their trees. They wanted Richard to kill it. So in the afternoon he and I

started out. Accompanied by Rigu and some others, we slid and clambered down the hill-side towards the place where the den was reported to be. Rigu, who led the party, was greatly excited. When we were near the spot I was told to climb up into a tree, and the hill-man whom we called Henry Tudor was to stay with me while Richard, Rigu and a few others stood behind some rocks a short way off. We had no idea from which side the bear would appear. As I waited, standing on a branch of a silver oak, I grew more and more nervous, and at last I shook all over. I could just see Richard in his rough khaki clothes, his collar open at the neck and his rifle in his hand. After about an hour of suspense something was seen stirring amongst the trees and a deep thrill ran through us all. I could see Rigu peering over his rock, his curly head bobbing up and down with eagerness. Then my companion on the tree moved, touched me, and, pointing, said softly with intense excitement:

'Baloo! Baloo!'

I looked, and saw through the undergrowth a big soft black bear that stood on its hind legs and shook the trees, and then dropped down again

noiselessly, and moved its great self about with extraordinary quietness.

'Baloo! Baloo!' my companion whispered: and at last Rigu saw him, and then Richard, and he fired. How loud sounded the noise that broke that stillness – and then the sudden plunge and roar of the bear as it hurled itself towards us! But while it was still a little distance off Richard fired again. There was another roar and a rattle of stones, and then silence.

Rigu jumped up on to a rock and danced there, waving his golden cap and shouting with joy, and I tried to climb down from the tree, trembling still, but no longer from fear; however, Henry Tudor stopped me, shaking his head and smiling and saying in his melodious tones something I couldn't understand.

The bear wasn't killed. He was badly wounded and had crept under some rocks. There was an interval while different plans were discussed. But it was already beginning to grow dark and soon the excitement died down, and thinking of the bear I felt wretched. With its furry coat it had looked so like a child's big toy. No more would it hunt about among the trees, hoping for honey.

We climbed slowly up the hill again. The villagers and their priest came and thanked Richard, salaaming again and again, and a man amongst them gave me a bunch of narcissi. How sweet the flowers were! And life, I thought, as I looked at the little group, what a mixed affair! Here the flowers and the delighted villagers, and there the wounded bear under the rocks in the dark.

Next morning, after Richard had gone down and found and killed the bear, we climbed higher to go on with our journey. After riding some distance through green glooms the path brought us out on to the side of a hill, and there – through the straight rough trunks of gigantic deodars – I saw, with a soft inner shock, distant shapes, mightily ranged, the shining Himalayas. The sight struck me with a kind of terror, those mountains seemed wrought upon a different scale from anything else on earth or in the experience of human kind. 'And yet there are men living near those snows,' I thought, 'pilgrims, and holy men in caves, who have chosen that way of life.'

'Think of the hermits – the rishis living up there with their austere and solemn joys,' I said to

Richard rather priggishly, pointing to the mountains with my riding-whip.

'Joys!' he laughed. 'Humph! What joys can there be up there in the cold? Neither joy nor use, to my mind.'

And he went on to ask me whether I thought *I* should find up there the peace they talked of; I told him I wasn't made of such heroic stuff and could not do without earthly delights, but that the rare people I was thinking of, who might belong to any race or any religion, existed on a different level and had a different sense of reality. But we didn't argue for long; he wouldn't agree that there were other joys – far more living and exultant – than ours.

After our midday meal we got out on to the open hot hill-side, harsh with wind and sun after the moist forest. We passed some bushes covered with small black medlars, which Richard and I ate with glee. There was a flock of goats on the brow of the hill. They had gathered themselves together in the shade of the one big tree there and a bright-eyed herdsman sat on a rock above them. The speckled sun and shadow fell on the scattered stones and goats all white and brown.

It must have been this that Shelley imagined when he wrote:

'Would he and I were far away
Keeping flocks in Himalay.'

Our hill-men talked to the shepherd, who smiled and answered lazily.

Looking down and across the valley, we saw the town of Chahla lying pale in the sun, with a jade-coloured river flowing beneath its walls. It was a burning day. The ridged hills quivered in the heat; umber and pinkish hills made up all the scene. The town is built on a steep slope; it is all the same ochre colour, except the white palace which sprawls above it. We rode on and down, our ponies picking their way carefully among the stones that went rattling down the steep path. There were cliffs above the river with adventurous walls running along the top of them, and a drawbridge had to be crossed before one could enter the town.

Waiting for us at the end of the bridge was a man who gave us the Rajah's card. The road then leaves the turbulent river with the deodar logs swirling down it and climbs in zigzags up the

opposite hill. We paused on a grassy space at the top to rest our ponies, and looking back saw the rough track by which we had come and the high bridge over the river. Beneath us lay the State prison; the prison-yard had two slender trees in it and there the prisoners were sitting or sprawling in the sun. The thieves wear red caps, so the native officials told us, the murderers blue. Richard complimented him on the fine number of murderers, and the man grinned.

We went on to the Guest House. It was a spacious building set in a terraced garden running along the top of the cliff, and the garden was full of strange trees and flowers. The servants who came out to meet us were dressed in green and gold with a golden sun embroidered on their turbans and on the front of their long coats.

Our host, the Rajah, came to call in the evening. He was all in white and rode a black horse with a man running at his stirrup. He had a thin and rather sad-looking face and pale hands. His family have been rulers here for hundreds of years. He talked to Richard about international politics, and of some articles about India in the *National Review*; he also talked of the last Ameer

of Afghanistan and of Mr. Gladstone, who seemed a queer couple to link together.

Before leaving, he turned to me and asked whether I had seen and admired the view of the snows on the way to this place. I said yes, and asked him if he had ever known anyone who had gone up into the high ranges as a hermit or on a pilgrimage. He told me he had not; but his great-uncle, who in his father's time had been Vizier of the State, had suddenly given up everything in order to become a 'religious'. No one knew where he had gone; he had disappeared, leaving all the world behind him.

After the Rajah had left I went up to my room, and then out on to the balcony. It was now dark. Beneath me lay the garden and the deep ravine, above were the glimmering snows. I thought of the Temple in the town which the Rajah had told us about where a service had been held every night since A.D. 600. There was no sound in the air but the hum of insects and the rush of the dark water flowing deep in its bed below. Up the pillars of the verandah jasmine, roses and stephanotis were twining, and the starry flowers gleamed white in the dimness. It was magical! The whole world

seemed to be drugged with the perfume of the flowers and of the night. The sweetness of the scent troubled me; it drowned my disconnected thoughts, which melted into a dream of the soft damp forest, of the bear we had killed, of the prisoners in the bare yard, and of the pilgrims on their hard way. There was no moon; but the stars were blazing and by their light the snows were faintly seen. 'That other life,' I thought again, 'the life of search and prayer. . . .'

At last I turned to go in, and there, brushing against my face, was a full and perfect rose. Cream-coloured, it gleamed like a pearl in the still enchanted night. All romance, all earthly loveliness, seemed to lie folded in those lustrous petals. That rose at least was at peace within itself!

'Dear lovely life!' I cried out. 'Can the Yogis find anything more precious than this after all? This flower, this symbol, this promise that on the earth lovers shall "capture their eternal hour".'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

★

The rain poured down on Agra, on the noisy choking streets, on the colossal rose-red fort that seemed to sleep in its passive strength, on the mosques and minarets, on the shimmering Taj Mahal. It poured, too, with a deafening noise upon our hotel. Such storm-rain as that hypnotizes one – I stood and watched and felt it in a sort of trance – the water streaming off the roof, the flowers beaten down, the clouds torn again and again by swift blue lightning.

All the morning it had been intolerably hot; I had wandered about my big room for hours trying to pack, continually sipping iced lemonade, and standing between any window and door where the tiniest draught moved. I had sat and looked out at the trees from the balcony. They were crowded with little parrots, tossing from branch to branch restlessly, and two bright blue jays sat perched on a dusty ledge. The red dust blew chokingly about the yard outside where the servants dozed in the shade. Then suddenly a wind began to blow, but fiery hot; the parched leaves fell pattering off the

trees and the tawny dust danced round and round in little columns. Thunder rolled, and uneasily there fell heavy, heavy drops on to the roof. There seemed a breathless pause before the eager rain came splashing down. Even the parrots' quarrelling had died away. How thick the rain fell! The dust became all at once red mud; the roads were little rivers with the drops falling deep into them.

We had planned to go to Fatephur Sikri, that derelict city which the Emperor Akbar built. He built it on a ridge in an immense plain, upon a spot where no one but the saint Salim Christi had lived until he founded his royal city, which after twenty-five years was utterly abandoned. It stands there still after these centuries; its mosques, its palaces, its Hall of Audience, its soaring pillars – perfect and stable.

The motor that was to take us stood waiting under the hotel porch; it looked rather stranded and absurd in a sea of mud. Vehemently the rain poured on. Everyone said it was too wet to go. A dead city, they said, was cheerless enough on a fine day, bats hanging from dank ceilings and snakes in the rubble of old walls; in the pelting

rain and thunder it would be altogether too depressing.

'It is our last chance,' I repeated: 'I must go. I will go, even if I go alone.'

'What nonsense!' Richard exclaimed, and went on to say that he couldn't understand why I was so 'crazy' over Akbar.

I said that it was better to be crazy about Akbar than about Napoleon. 'Napoleon,' I continued, 'makes a shoddy figure beside him – always boasting of conquest. Akbar said conquest by the sword wasn't worth calling conquest.'

'Napoleon was the greatest soldier that ever lived,' replied Richard.

'But Akbar was everything,' I went on; 'not only a soldier and Emperor, but a visionary and philosopher as well.'

'Oh, is that all?' said Richard.

'Not quite,' I answered, and told him that Akbar was also a wonderful horseman and musician – and a great hunter until his conscience forbade him to kill even the smallest of living creatures.

'Well, anyhow,' said Richard, 'I am not going to his city in this storm.'

Eventually a woman staying in the hotel declared that she was ready to accompany me, and we started off, feeling a little silly, under a mountain of rugs and waterproofs. It is twenty miles from the living city to the dead one – a strange desolate drive under the purple-clouded, sinister sky. We passed through a village drained of all living things except a few bedraggled dogs that barked at us as we went by. 'Is there a dead village,' I wondered, 'as well as a dead city?' But a little farther on we came upon all the villagers gathered in a field. They were surging together in a crowd, chanting loudly, and in their midst, from out of the green crops, a huge canary-coloured idol stood up erect and hideous. The people were singing and dancing round it; unnatural and grotesque swayed the erection which they sometimes seized and carried along. Like a large vacant toy it gazed blankly in whatever direction it was set down. How strangely light did the wet meaningless shape of blotched yellow and white stand out against the thick stormy sky.

Driving on down the broad road of Akbar's making we talked in a desultory way of the Moghul dynasty. I said it seemed odd that so little

should be made of Akbar, who outshone all the most brilliant figures in history. He always thought of the whole, not of parts; his curiosity and energy would not let him rest in incompleteness. His life was an endless search. 'It is Thee I seek from temple to temple' was his constant thought. I said I would rather have seen him than any man who ever lived, excepting, perhaps, Saint Paul.

'A rather ugly little Jew, I expect,' my companion remarked. 'And with him we should have had to be content to be seen and not heard. He didn't like women who talked much.'

'I should have been more than content to listen,' I answered. 'And so, too, with Akbar. Besides, in his case the mere spectacle would have been wonderful enough; his pomp and ceremonial, his magnificent caprices – for instance, the games of chess with elephants and horses and wreathed children for pieces, moving about in the courtyard of black and white marble.'

We had come at last to the outer walls, the gateways and the ruined fortifications of the city. The motor stopped by a deserted doorway and we got out. The storm was still raging, but in the dis-

tance; here the rain had ceased and the gaunt red palaces stood up wet and clear against the dark sky. Forked lightning ran and flickered behind the minarets and domes, but in the superb city itself nothing stirred. We went forward. Feeling small and shy, we walked across a great emptiness of courtyards shining with pools of rain. We went down colonnades and cloisters – past towers and terraces and tombs. Oppressively royal did the place seem even now in its desertion.

I wonder if any other spot upon the earth is so deeply stamped with the mark of a single man? Akbar's virility and imaginativeness are seen everywhere – in the small austere chamber where he spent his short night, in the Hall of Audience where he debated with wise men of every religion, in his Mosque, in his Hospital, and in the small but exquisite Palace which he built for Birbal, his minstrel friend.

Grass was now growing between the stones that pave the city, and nothing but the peacock's harsh cry of wet weather breaks the silence in which it lies. Having left my companion behind, I went on, moving quietly, half afraid of the sound of my own footsteps. Before me there rose the mother-

of-pearl tomb erected for the Saint. Feeling muddy and damp, I stood looking at the shimmering shape, set like a pearl amongst the massive red walls, the dark wet paving-stones of the courtyard reflecting its milky sheen. It set me thinking of that deep reverence for holiness that is always found in India. 'But even this is not the heart of the place,' I thought, and moved on uncertainly. A small uneasy wind had sprung up; I was feeling tired; a peculiar melancholy lay over everything, and I wanted to turn back. And then all at once I got there! I had come upon the Gate of Victory – a gateway crowning a vast flight of steps that descends into the plain. There is no road beyond, only a great spread of desolate land. I stood at the top of the steps; the glorious portal rising above me lifted its towers and cupolas high into a grey sky of drifting tattered clouds. A broad band of white marble inlaid with black Persian characters runs round the huge red span of the arch, and I remembered the words which Akbar had there engraved:

'Said Jesus, on whom be peace: The world is a bridge. Pass over it, but build no house therein.

Who hopes for an hour hopes for Eternity. Spend the hour in prayer. The rest is unknown.'

The damp air was soaked with quietness; below, smudged amongst the few trees were three little huts; the smoke of an evening fire trailed slowly up through the heavy atmosphere, and the smell of it came mingled with the poignant smell of wet earth. It was so still! yet less than four centuries ago this place had been full of brilliant life; men and women had poured jostling each other up and down the way where now only a peacock sat huddled on a wall. The plain, immense and forlorn, stretched away and away till the green crops faded into unsubstantial blue; India itself seemed to lie there before one. And those great steps, in how sublime a fashion did they rise out of the plain – so enduring, and no one to use them – so magnificent, and no one to wonder!

A door at the base of one of the towers stood open, and, going in, I found there was a twisting staircase let in the wall. I climbed up it, the crumbling plaster falling off in flakes as I went by, and presently I came out on to a marble balcony, which gleamed white after the rain. This was the

place where Akbar used to sit in the evening and gaze out over his wide land. 'There were warm showery evenings then, as now,' I thought, 'making places intimate and tender; and he must have looked out upon a scene just like this.'

I stood still for a long time, drenched in utter loneliness, thinking how 'age after age the tragic empires rise'. I remembered that not many years after his death Akbar's bones had been dug up and burnt and the ashes scattered to the wind. A chill wind blew round me now. Already the purplish web of dusk was blotting the distance out. It was time to leave. I waited a moment to watch a wet mongoose run across the steps far below, and then turned to go down the dark stairs again. As I went down in that blank silence fear struck me. I felt the past was merging with the present and might suddenly become tangible. I might see Akbar! When I got out into daylight again, I was trembling. The peacock, startled by my sudden appearance, fluttered clumsily off the wall with a grating cry. I fled away.

CHAPTER TWELVE

★

INDIA, all its magnificence and solemnity, its vast complicated pattern of men and religions, lies behind me now. Here in Ceylon living seems much simpler – a sort of intimate child's play. Here all thought is relaxed.

This lovely river in front of me flows along broad and still between trees and rustling bamboos that, spraying high into the air, are like towering fountains of green; the slow paddy-boats float lazily down-stream, passing in and out of liquid green shadow and liquid green light. Their thatched roofs give them a home-like air. Children and kids play together among the big combs of plantains that hang heavily – yellow heaps on the yellowish straw. Men, naked except for a loin-cloth, sit in front and behind; they chant in a monotone; they chew betel-nut, their mouths are scarlet with the juice.

Yesterday evening I went down to the steps by the river; a paddy-boat was lying there with the men squatting idly about it. I looked along the shadowed river and imagined it flowing on, mile

after mile, through the warm spicy land; and then, as I looked, there came walking slowly down it an elephant with its mahout, in ruby-coloured cap, upon its back. When it came nearer the men in the boat waved and called, and the elephant turned towards us and came lumbering through the water to the steps. It stood in the clear ripples there and played tricks like a child; it tossed the water from its waving trunk in jets and falling crystal circles; it lay down in the river, its side alone showing like a round grey rock; it trumpeted in the sunny stillness of the evening, and lifted one huge baggy leg and then another, while the man on its back danced and grinned and opened his great eyes wide and shouted. At last I laid a tiny silver coin on a rock, and it put out its trunk and picked up the piece and gave it to the man, who smiled again, and then they went off once more on their slow journey down the middle of the balmy river.

One day we ourselves walked down a rocky river-bed when the water was very low. Overhead were trees heavy with round green fruit which fell and floated, like burnished balls, in the water below. We clambered over smooth, wet

stones that sometimes had butterflies' wings sticking to them – glistening peacock blue or metallic green. It was all softly silent, only occasionally there came the call of a bird or the sound of fruit dropping into the water. Soon we came to a little cascade, a plume of feathery white falling in the dense dusk of green; and once with a thrill I saw a long black rat-snake lying along the warm surface of a rock. We had almost reached it when it glided into the dark pool below, but when we peered into the clear depth nothing was to be seen.

Above us were swaying creepers, often starred with tiny flowers, hanging from the trees like curtains, like swings, like ropes twisted and strong, and sometimes orchids were growing in them and between the forks of the trees; a little farther on we passed moist patches of ground grown over with ferns and big-leaved spotted caladiums, claret-coloured and veined red, and there it was that I found – ivory in the dark depths of the jungle – pancratium lilies, stiff, erect and fragrant. I picked two or three of the thick-stalked dripping things, and all the way home their faint perfume came up to me on the damp still air.

Another walk that I shall never forget was one along a jungle road at midnight. How wonderful was the silence, the stifling scented stillness of that night! The earth seemed to be drugged by its own scents and heat. I remember, as I went along looking up at the fronds of the palms outlined against the crowded starry sky – I remember how there trailed across the road a scent so sweet, so strong, that it seemed to concentrate in itself all the ecstasy of that land, all the intoxication of the still heavy night.

I stopped and felt my way through the gloom until I found the flowering tree; I broke off a few twigs, and when we had light again I saw I held a kind of rosy stephanotis with long slender stems and soft velvety leaves. How thickly the fire-flies glittered in all the trees, carrying their tiny golden lights high in flying curves. Some men were fishing in the river with torches and nets; the fierce orange light fell on their wet bending bodies and lit fitfully the branches soaring above them. The different lights made a golden embroidery on the darkness; there were long golden lines following the ripples on the water; there were the bright points of gold tracing the

flight of the fire-flies, and in the sky above was the glitter of the stars.

Only two people stand out in my mind with any clearness in the long stretch of those solitary days. One was a wrinkled old man, in discoloured clothes, who one morning climbed up the verandah steps. He looked poor and battered enough, but his voice was decided and he carried himself with dignity. Having bowed, he pulled from out of his sagging pockets some dirty little bundles, then undid the dingy wrappings carefully, and suddenly there sparkled upon the table a small heap of shining sapphires, all palpitating azure; next appeared the clear watered green of aquamarines; then topazes, flashing rubies, big yellow tourmalines and brilliant rose-garnets. After these came handfuls of slippery soft-sheened moonstones, milky and clouded, and dull lovely star-sapphires with their imprisoned floating stars of light. There they lay in sparkling piles, these radiant dewdrops of colour, bright jewels blazing among the bits of old newspaper and rag. And the shabby old man looked up at us with a faint smile of invitation.

The other whom I remember is the madman

who lived near the river. He was quite gentle, they told us; he used to sit under the bridges and laugh so loudly that you could hear his mirthless maniacal laughter from a long way off. One day I was bending down looking at the Sensitive Plant which grows softly along the side of the road here, and when I looked up again I saw him coming along, his dark cloth of striped olive-green and brown pulled over his head, so that his wild long hair and wild eyes could hardly be seen. He was tall and strong, but he walked very slowly. Two or three boys were following him, jumping about and pointing, and throwing pebbles at his feet. Then I saw with peculiar horror that his feet were loosely tied together. I spoke to the boys, and the man stopped for a minute and gazed at us from his other distant world of consciousness. As I met his dazed glance an extraordinary tumult of grief broke over me. In that figure all the helpless misery of the world seemed to be focused, and life seemed drenched with pain. I felt I could never again be as happy as before. 'And no one can help,' I cried out in myself, 'no one since Jesus in Galilee! This man would surely not be like that other madman among the

sharp stones of the hill-side, who said: "What have I to do with Thee?" – this man's face is so sad and puzzled. It is asking for help.'

'Anyhow, you are splendid to look at, wasted and helpless as you are. Anyhow, I shall never forget you,' I said to him half aloud, 'never – never!' After a moment he went shuffling on down the road, and the children stopped to look at me instead, thinking me equally mad, no doubt, as I stood there murmuring to myself and blinded by tears.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

★

It was on a day of scorching sun broken by heavy showers that we came to the once royal city of Kandy. The lake, that slab of green water lying in the warm lap of green hills, slept in the heat. At one end of it, steeped in age and quiet, was the beautiful queer Temple of soft weather-beaten yellow stone; its yellow reflection in the water of the moat never rippled. Outside the gate was a group of jabbering beggars, and inside, seated on the broad low steps, the halt, the lame and the blind held out begging-bowls and begging hands and whined and droned in the hot sunshine. A perpetual plaint rose and fell, but it was languid as if the heat made even this effort too great. Half-way up the steps, surrounded by low trellised walls, was a tank of thick beetle-green water full of tortoises. The water was choked with them; they were sacred and torpid; they put their ageless-looking heads out against the baked walls and the people dropped food down to them, leaning idly against the wall, too.

Inside the Temple it was dim and cool, and

fragrant with the scent of spice and flowers. A few beggars followed us about, their thin Oriental hands outstretched. We wandered down the cloisters, where some of the walls were painted with crude sprawling pictures of future punishments for sin. A curious impression of beauty and slovenliness was given by the mixture of lovely carven pillars and the litter of faded flowers, the images of gold and ivory and the floor untidy and unswept. Creamy heaps of heavy dying Temple blossoms lay in the dark corners, making the air oppressive and languorous with their thick sweetness; the perfume of them hung all about the courts. In one place under the arcade young green coco-nuts were piled up in a heap, and scattered everywhere upon the ground were long slender flower-tassels from the areca-nut palm. One could not take a step without treading upon those tassels of honey-colour or palest sulphur-green, which I loved to let slide through my hands and to swing from side to side.

It was a day of festival. The barefooted people moved about softly, carrying offerings in flat baskets. Against one wall there stood a row of Buddhist monks, yellow robes against the yel-

lowish walls; some followed the people's movements with their eyes, others waited there with abstracted looks of gentle reflection. Then an older monk with a face like a calm Voltaire came striding down the cloister; wrapped in a sunflower-coloured robe, he walked disdainfully by.

Up at the top of the Temple, in a russet-tiled tower, there is an octagonal room where the sacred books are kept. We were taken there by a priest who went noiselessly before us along the dark corridor. For a long time we had to stand at the door, and knock and knock again before it was slowly opened by a very old monk with a shaven head and a face like a shrivelled mask, so little life was there moving behind the eyes. The room had windows all round looking on to the lake, and the water threw up a queer yellow-green light which flooded the room. The sacred books were much worn, but richly bound in faded browns and reds and gold. Some, looking very precious, were wrapped in soft coverings of fine silk. I wondered if they all told of the starry piety of the Buddha, but the old monk showed them very mechanically and without any interest. He was wishing to be left undisturbed again as soon

as might be. On the table, amongst objects of gold and alabaster, there was a lovely silvery bunch of trumpet-flowers and also some clamourous-looking paper flowers of light magenta with unearthly emerald-green leaves. We did not stay there long; and directly we left we heard the old priest close and lock the doors behind us.

It was blinding to come down again into the vibrating glare of the full daylight after that dusky dimness. A shower of rain had fallen, leaving all the palm-leaves shining and the heat even damper than before. I stood on the steps looking vaguely at the torpid tortoises and the torpid beggars dozing against the walls, and seeing the natives passing along the road with their clothes, soaked through by the rain, clinging tightly to their bodies. The cream-coloured bullocks, with beads round their meek strong heads, looked like creatures carved in smooth ivory. And then, approaching slowly down the wet red road, came some Kandyan chiefs. It was plain that they were on their way to some function. Their robes were of the thinnest finest muslin embroidered in all bright colours, and had stiffly-padded golden

sleeves. Set like platters upon their venerable heads they wore square golden hats that went up into a point. August, enormous, and made ungainly by the yards upon yards of muslin wrapped around them, they came along, each with an attendant behind shading him with a decorated umbrella; each pegtop figure more unexpected and curious than the last. I stared entranced, feeling that for hours I should like to watch them proceeding in front of the Temple there with the huge umbrellas steadily following too. And yet they had great dignity, a stateliness that not even that ridiculous headgear could destroy. Their deliberate gait, their golden hats, their heavy calm! It was like looking at a rich grotesque frieze which some magic had charmed into a ponderous, slowly-moving life.

Yes, I thought, even in these days there is enough here for the imagination to feast on. To-night, as in the past, the Temple elephants will come out in procession, hung with jewels, hung with garlands, and carry the sacred water to the sacred river through the tropic night. The women dance about them swinging their full skirts of golden-yellow; as they circle they toss up golden

balls and catch them again; the torches pour forth flame; the fire rushes upward through the profound soft darkness, and in the leaping light the devil-dancers whirl, furtive and tigerish; their cymbals clash and clang; their panting bodies are streaked with yellow paint; the streaked masks – the streaked skins slung on their backs – all this is real, but oh, how strange, how wild to see!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

★

I AM waiting for the tropic rain to come down the valley. I am sitting at the window looking over the valley. There is thunder over the jungle and over the hills. Here it is very still and very hot. The house has been silent ever since the native 'Boy' came in with his silly face and his silly smile and a silly cap of black and yellow on the back of his head. He wanted to know what the Master would have for breakfast? And Missie? I told him; and after the sound of his bare feet had died away down the passage everything again was still. I am alone in my pink dress near the window; beside me there is a vase of hybiscus and pink lilies. My dress has been faded by the fierce sun. But there is no sun now; it is getting dark; banks of cloud are rolling up and inside them are flickers of lightning. The jungle looks purply-dark; the rain will soon be streaming off all the big leaves; the little paths will be softer than ever and the heavy fragrance more heavy and earthy still. The waves of fragrance wafted over one turn one into another being.

But how many different waves of feeling there are in this tropic island! Waves of terror, waves of lassitude, waves of deep jubilation. Just now I am peaceful, ready to be soaked in the coolness and peace of the rain.

Last month it was different. Last month, when Tim was here, I seemed to be a creature without a soul. Just soulless fruits of the tree of life we seemed to be – or flowers, blossoming, fading, dying. When we walked together in the jungle I seemed to myself, in my pink dress, to be no less light and perishable than any flower. And why shouldn't Tim find this transient thing sweet? And why should I hold back? It was all a fairy-tale – in which nothing mattered. Only I couldn't lose the sense that another greater story was being told – a story of Time and Death and Change; and in that story Jack came too.

But I didn't want to think of Jack, nor to listen to the story which the jungle tells through the hot days and the hot nights, century after century the same. We were so young to be obliged to listen. Tim in his grey flannels and bright tie and sun-hat, did he feel as I did, that this was all a fairy-tale, and that outside the fragile fairy-tale there

was doom? One day we were walking along the secret jungle paths, and I had taken off my hat, and had a handful of flowers and ferns picked as we went along. How alone we were in the silence of the daytime. I went on in front under the high flowering trees. The little paths curled in and out, and round rocks with ferns in every cleft, and creepers hung in swaying festoons about us. Tim wanted me to sit down with him; at last he caught my hand. I shook my head. 'I'll stop when I get to the end,' I told him. There was a little door of light and sunshine ahead of us. And there, just at the edge of the jungle, I stopped.

The sun smote down on the colourless withered plain beyond. I sat in the shadow, and he was near behind me.

'Look at me, darling,' he said. 'I want to see again if your eyes are green or blue. No – look at me! I want to see your eyes.'

I hardly heard him. 'How burnt the plains are!' I was thinking. 'The sun soaks into them like rain. And before any men lived here the sun was beating down on this same loneliness.'

I wondered if I should tell Tim what I was thinking about. But what was the use? He was

happy, I supposed, thinking about me. He was living deep in the fairy-tale, and I was only half inside it. He moved nearer to me.

'Please don't kiss me,' I said.

Then he began pleading, and I tried to listen, but I couldn't make myself. I seemed to be so swamped in the teeming life of the jungle that I had no life or mind of my own. That heavy mood! How I wished he would wake me out of it! But he couldn't. Perhaps, if we lived here, I thought, this scented earth would lose its power.

What hours we spent together, all in one mood. In the hot daytime we caught quivering lizards that came flashing like bits of emerald enamel from under stones. We ate magenta passion-fruit and picked flowers and chased butterflies. We were even younger than our years; we were children. We watched the chattering natives pick the tea, and in the evening bring in the baskets of fresh young leaves and empty them out. How idly they picked the leaves over. Their coarse dark faces seemed strange and stupid to me. Evening after evening I gazed at them. The pruners' names are taken down, the leaf is

weighed, and the names are called: Perimal, Ramen, Veripan, Marimuter.

The head-man has a clever face. And he doesn't chatter like the rest. Their chatter never ceases till they have all gone away, following each other down the little paths winding through the tea.

One night there was a moon. The moonlight glistened down, terribly clear. Tim said: 'Come out. Let's listen to the wanderoos in the jungle. Come! I want to hear the pariah dogs barking at the moon.' And he led me, half in a dream, out into that strange desolation of lonely moonlight.

'From here,' he said, 'you can see even the maidenhair at the bottom of the gully, the moon is so bright – and the wet stones where the cobra lives, and the shrine.'

The sound of the wanderoos came from far, and the sharp querulous barking of the thin dogs in the valley below; and looking down upon the little daubed shrine, I pictured the hideous idol inside – deformed and leering.

The moonlight, which put me into a kind of trance, seemed to flood Tim with excitement.

'I'm going to get on to the rock and shout,' he

said. 'I'll scream; and the coolies down there, they'll think it is a devil.'

He climbed the high rock where Vasivuthen beats his dreary tom-tom at the end of the working day, and standing there, his young head lifted, he sent call after call down along the valley – the quiet valley brimmed up with moonlight.

I shivered. 'You frighten me,' I said. 'Please let's go in.' And I told him I felt it dreary out there, with the barking of the monkeys and the hungry dogs, and the fear in the hearts of the people, and the ugly little idol leering in its dark shrine.

'Not yet,' he said, climbing down from the rock. 'Don't go in yet!' he pleaded.

I smiled. I liked to see his grave young face smile whenever I did.

'You must listen to me, darling,' he said. 'You must let me tell you –'

But I wouldn't. 'Please let's go in,' I said. Only he wouldn't let me. He stood laughing in front of the little door with both arms out.

Well, he has gone now. I wonder if I ought to have been different while he was here. I couldn't respond to his feeling any more than I could

repel it. To me it was all one with the heavy fragrance and the listless warmth. All the time he was with us I moved as in an opium dream. Like a child I was led by him here and there. But at last we made him go away. For he had come from England to see the world, and so far he had clung to this tiny lonely spot. We made him go. I went a little way down the road with him. We went along past the hedge of orange tangapou and past the tree ferns, he leading his horse slowly along. It was evening; there was no sun to strike on our bare heads. The coolies were walking along the road in twos and threes. I stopped to say good-bye. And the coolies gathered nearer as we stood still. He looked so tall amongst them – proud-faced and slender. He gazed at me, and the dark faces around gazed wonderingly at us. We seemed to be suspended in a motionless bubble of Time – so still it was.

Then he dropped the reins from his hand and turned full to me with the same question in his eyes. No movement, no sound came from those dark figures standing by. I shook my head. He mounted and rode away: the bubble of Time broke and life moved on again.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

★

The rain has come now; every leaf drips heavily. I wonder if it cools the trodden, ruined space in that other jungle far away, where we went to see the ending of the great drive of elephants. That time, when I look back on it, seems rather hateful to me – the torrid days and thirsting nights, the dusty trapped animals, and the stinging insects.

After leaving the train we had a long drive in a bullock-cart which bumped along the rough track through the jungle. The driver flicked at the black bullocks and shouted at them incessantly. They went at a very slow trot, but it shook the springless cart mercilessly, jolting us and our boxes this way and that. We bought some green coco-nuts, I remember, and drank every drop of the milk eagerly.

A sort of village had been built in the jungle and crowds of natives had collected to see the last act. Everything had been made out of palm-leaves: there was even a palm-leaf post office and a palm-leaf hotel. Little huts had been put up for

us, in which we each had a tiny room with just a camp-bed and a chair. Outside, perched on three sticks, was a basin to wash in. Such light as there was came in through the flimsy leaf door.

In the evening we went to look at the stockade, which was concealed amongst the trees and thorny bushes. It had a very wide neck that gradually narrowed down and made an entrance to a round space enclosed by a wall of great posts and crossed logs tied together with jungle rope. Towards this mouth the herd of wild elephants had been driven night by night for weeks by an army of beaters. And now at last they were said to be quite near the hidden opening.

On our way to the place we met tame elephants lumbering along the narrow paths with branches of trees or enormous sheaves of green stuff tucked under their trunks. Others, tied up for the night, were eating the gathered fodder and treading everything down flat round them. Fat brown babies, belonging to their keepers, played amongst them, talking shrilly and running in and out between the massive legs.

Later on, when night came, I found it difficult to go to sleep, and lying on my camp-bed through

the hot night I listened to the trumpeting of the wild elephants, which at times drowned the continuous whirring of the insects. Rifles, too, were occasionally fired off, and sometimes the yells and howls of the beaters rose to such a frantic pitch that one imagined the whole herd must be charging back.

In the morning we went to the stockade again, and then it was said that the elephants would all be in by the afternoon. Certainly the shouting and shooting did now sound very close indeed. So we waited, crouching down as we were told. Occasionally a beater would run forward, gesticulating wildly, signal to every one to keep quiet and rush back again. One of the head-men of the district was beating too; I had seen him before and heard him speaking a careful pedantic English. It was odd to see him now, nearly naked, his long hair twisted up behind his head, a great rifle in his hand, rushing in and out of the jungle. His body was glistening with sweat and he was shouting instructions, but occasionally he stopped politely to talk with someone in his precise English.

At last the whisper went round that the herd was actually in the mouth of the stockade. But

alas! the next report was that an old elephant who first had gone in, recognizing it for a trap, had come out again, and that this had turned the whole herd back. It seemed little use trying to move them forward again just then.

By this time we were getting rather tired. There was very little shade under those thin trees; the sun beat down upon the parched crackling ground and struck up again into one's face; a matted prickly undergrowth spread everywhere. The beaters, too, were beginning to lose heart. They sent word to one of their priests to call upon the Elephant God. A thin man close to us stepped out from the crowd. After declaiming loudly for a few minutes he pressed his high cap firmly on to his head and broke into a clumsy dance. Round and round he went while his friends chanted and beat tom-toms in a circle about him. In the end he fell into a kind of trance and declared that the elephants would not come in of themselves that day. But, he added, he wasn't afraid of wild elephants; they would recognize him as an elephant-priest. So he would go and put a spell on them and force them to come in.

An avenue was made through the awed and

admiring crowd and the poor man disappeared proudly into the trees – his last triumphant moment of life! For he went on, we were afterwards told, right up to the place where the elephants had gathered. There, with his arms raised high, he solemnly conjured them to follow him. Pathetic faith in his calling! One of the elephants lifted him up with its trunk and dashed him to the ground. He was dead, and afterwards they carried him back and laid him in the thorny jungle.

That night the little booths of the impromptu village were lit by large flares, and before them the brightly clad crowd passed and re-passed. The wares were chiefly brilliant rolls and bundles of stuff, fruits and vegetables, and bottles of raw-coloured drinks. The rows of saffron, ruby-red and wry pink drinks glowed in that harsh light. One or two white planters were strolling about singing; bullock-carts jolted along with their grunting, grumbling drivers; some men sat by the wayside reading to themselves in high sing-song voices; the noosers, huge men with hairy legs, swaggered up and down in the middle of the road. These were experts who had come from a long

way off to noose the elephants when they were at last trapped.

It was curious undressing in one's little hot den with its floor of the same pebbly sand as the road outside, along which one heard the people walking and talking. The next morning when my 'Boy' brought me the very small ration of brownish water that was allowed for the day, he told me that the herd was safely in the stockade. They had been driven in during the night when all was quiet. So as soon as we had had breakfast we hurried off there, and clambered up into a little platform that had been built in the trees. At last we saw them! There they were – a moving mass of elephants, huddling and circling about in the middle of the enclosure trying to get as far as possible from the noisy crowd of people that surrounded them. The trees that were left standing in the space they had already trampled so bare were dusty green, the elephants dusty grey. They looked inexpressibly weary. Among them were a good many big ones. One young bull had been killed just outside the gate of the stockade because he kept charging back.

Fires had been lighted all round the edge of the

enclosed ground, and there the beaters now sat resting, their rifles and long sticks by them, ready to shout and yell should an animal come anywhere near the side. For the wall of the stockade was mere bluff, as we soon saw, for one of the tame elephants inside the enclosure happened to take fright at a rifle shot and came plunging towards us. With trunk up and ears lifted, it paused a moment in front of the wall of great logs and branches, then lunged forward and went through as if it were matchwood. The people fled in all directions. And on it went! I never knew that elephants could career like that. Straight into the jungle it disappeared, the mahout on its back clinging there like a scared monkey.

It was exciting to watch the noosing, which was done by two gangs which went out in turn. A couple of trained elephants would advance, separate one of the animals from the rest of the herd, and then manœuvre to get one on each side of it. The wild elephant would either keep moving slowly on in front or dodge, or, if it were fierce, wheel round and charge. A man with a noose of very thick rope in his hand came crouching behind one or other of the tame elephants; it was his part

to run out, when the wild one's back was turned, and slip the noose round its leg as it lifted its foot. Sometimes this was quickly done, sometimes it took a long time. Occasionally the noose would slip off, and once or twice an unusually strong elephant managed to break the rope. When, however, the nooser had been successful and both the animal's hind legs had been noosed, the two decoys twisted the rope round the trunk of a thick tree and began to pull at it slowly and steadily. The crowd yelled to see the wild creature, which never before had gone any way but its own, now being dragged slowly backwards – much to its surprise and fear. Some elephants would begin trumpeting loudly, most horrible to hear; others fell down upon their knees. But it always ended in the same way: they were tied up to the tree and there left to struggle and pull, to heave and strain, until one thought those grey, loose, huge legs must surely come out of their sockets or the tree crack and fall. It was a horrid sight. It shamed one to see them, pulling and pulling at the rope and falling heavily forward on their trunks, and then stopping exhausted, and throwing the hot sand over their great heaving streaming sides.

It took a long time to secure the big bull of the herd. The rope broke twice, and he kept charging the decoys and making short dashes for the stockade wall, only to be turned back by the shouting and firing.

We spent most of the day upon our platform, and in the evening, after a pale full moon had floated up, we went back to the stockade. No breath of wind stirred; there fell no moisture of dew; and the thought of the trapped elephants made us wretched, although we knew they would be well treated later on.

The scene by night was unforgettable; the red ring of fires lighted on the ground; the men crouching round them; the glow on dark faces, long hair, bare bodies; the blankets laid on the earth and the rifles lying near by. Red clay pots full of rice were being cooked for the evening meal; the flames lit up twisted trunks of trees and dry creepers hanging down.

By the misty white light of the moon you could just see the tops of the trees swaying in the middle of the stockade and make out dark massive forms tramping slowly, silently, round and round. Like creatures in a dream, all those that had not been

noosed kept silently moving in that much-trampled space. Bewildered and exhausted, they kept close to one another. For a long time I looked at them and then again at the burning circle of fires, and I thought how little the crowd could do to disturb the vast stillness of the jungle stretching mile upon mile under the white moonlight.

We had started out on this expedition gaily enough, but a feeling of sadness had now crept in. Poor elephants! you are caught at last; the driving, relentless for six weeks, has stopped; you are allowed the peace of a prison, the quietness of a cage.

The next morning we were guided through the thorny undergrowth to the place where the elephant had been shot. There it lay, a great grey block, with just one bullet-wound between its eye and ear. I can see it now so clearly lying on the hot ground there just as it had fallen: the large ears flat back, the little eye dimmed, the thick dusty skin all wrinkled. A man in nothing but a loin-cloth and a dull indigo turban sat cross-legged on the ground beside it, patiently sawing off the feet. His bare body glistened beside that

lifeless grey mass; his eyes shone; he spat red betel-juice through his reddened teeth. Still sawing away, he looked up at us with a smile. The feet, he said, would make charms that brought luck. And I was faintly comforted to think that the poor elephant was to be of some little use after all; it seemed such a big thing to kill and leave. Perhaps this rain is falling there now and washing those broad bones white.

The elephants having all been safely tethered, the whole of kraal town dispersed in one day. The bullock-carts, stuffed with bedding and boxes, jolted away to the railway siding. All along the narrow track there was an unbroken stream of people eager to get back out of the jungle to their homes. But at the station many were left behind, including our luckless Boy, who rushed at door after door along the train, only to be repulsed at each and hurled backwards on to the platform.

All through the burning afternoon the little train panted through dry jungle; occasionally there came a puff of aromatic scent; occasionally one saw above the scrubby bushes a tree with flaring coral flowers; otherwise everything was

brown, sparse-coloured, withered. Covered with dust, we talked spasmodically of elephants, heat, insects, drinks. Whenever we stopped, all the passengers at once swarmed on to the platform like locusts and bought every green coco-nut or bottle of soda-water that was to be seen. All along in the cruel glare one saw thirsty planters in sun-hats, and pale women greedily drinking coco-nut milk or sharing tepid bottles of lemonade.

In the evening the train drew up at a small station, where we got out to wait for the night mail. It came presently, thundering along out of the soft velvety darkness. Very tired, but sleepless, I sat by the open window and looked out into the night. I thought of the thorny jungle we had just left, and of the dead elephant and the dead elephant-priest lying in it; I thought of the other glorious creatures I had lately seen overcome by men: the heavy bear in the fragrance of the Himalayan forest happily shaking the apricot trees; the young tiger with its shuddering roar, beating desperately against iron bars; and now these elephants pulling and pulling and falling in the dust. Human beings, with all their litter, chatter and brutality, seemed hardly worthy of their greater

power. How unattractive we had appeared, heated, jabbering, and fighting for places in the train!

But, as the train climbed higher and the heat lessened, all the ugliness of the last few days fell away from me. Dawn came, and with it beauty again at last. With delight I saw once more the soft green grass in the shady coco-nut groves – green grass and the lines of graceful stems crowned by feathery fronds, with orange and green nuts clustering in the centre and thick rinds lying on the ground below; I saw, too, the waxy-white splendour of trumpet-flowers in lonely thickets opening to the sun; I saw the pure blue 'morning glory' against the azure hills. How refreshing, how cool was the air! And before the sun had risen much farther I went to sleep.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

*

I THOUGHT I should be all alone at the hotel before getting on to the boat. Richard had gone back to India the day before by another route, so I arrived at the seaport by myself. All day, sitting by the window of the slow train, I had gazed out at the gradually changing landscape. At first I looked down on white waterfalls and wet rocks fringed with ferns, on grey curtains of rain that parted to disclose wide warm spaces of earth and sun and cloud. Then, as we dropped lower, I saw the flat paddy-fields with white paddy-birds flapping above them; I saw the pale tassels of areca-nut palms hanging down in the motionless air, and beyond them the blue of the distance, the soft, rich blue of the windless noonday. The stations were flowery with sweet, coloured garlands of creepers; oily-skinned natives came along the platforms with trays of green coco-nuts and coloured drinks and their call of water.

We ran down into the station an hour before sunset. I got out feeling confused after the long silence, and was glad to escape from the crowd of

chattering natives who surged along the platform. Outside there was magic in the soft evening air. After the hills the damp brooding heat made all smells and sounds seem different and more intense.

It was the first time I had stayed at a hotel alone, and I can remember my arrival with great distinctness: the hall with its long chairs where men were drinking iced drinks; the big windows through which the harbour water gleamed; the impassive Malay clerk with his parchment face; the long dim passage with white figures of servants squatting outside doors and the cool bareness of my own room.

A ship had just come in. When I went down into the hall again a group of travellers were standing by the office counter, and as I was walking past I recognized one of them. It was George Seaton, an acquaintance of Richard's, who was married and whom I had met once or twice in England and then once or twice again out here. What fun to find a friend, I said to myself; and just at that moment he looked up and caught sight of me.

'So you *are* here!' he cried. 'That's luck. I

wondered if I'd catch you. Where are the others – and Richard?'

I explained how I came to be there by myself.

'Well, I'll look after you,' he replied. 'But your boat is a day late. It won't be in till midnight to-morrow at the earliest.'

I was a little dashed by this news; for one thing, I didn't like him well enough to want to be alone with him for long.

'Let's dine together!' he went on. And I answered: 'Do let's,' for there was really nothing else to say.

He had suddenly made me feel childish as I stood by him there. In contrast with Tim he was oppressive and dominating. 'These are my last hours out here,' I thought sadly, 'and they will all be coloured by him.'

I dressed and found him waiting in the hall. He came up and complimented me on my dress. It was an old dress, I told him, which I had put on because it reminded me of home. I was feeling shy, and in the dining-room, as I looked across the table at George, his bantering looks and lazy talk made me shyer and shyer. I stared out of the big open window and felt a longing to escape.

Outside, over the warm ocean, burning clouds were flung in all directions across the sky; they looked like rose-pink feathers tossed up against the luminous blue.

'Has your time in India changed you?' asked George. 'Are you nicer or not so nice?'

'Just weaker,' I answered. And at that moment I was indeed feeling very weak. I was thinking, too, that somehow his time in the East had not improved him.

After dinner he led the way outside; a listless breeze, soft from the sea, blew languidly about us and stirred the divine warmth of the night. I saw a carriage with an old white horse waiting.

'I'm going to take you for a drive,' he said. 'It's the only thing to do when it's as hot as this.'

I looked before me, silent.

'Come!' he said.

But suddenly a wave of resolution swept over me and I shook my head. Before he had time to protest, I said good night and ran upstairs to my room.

Once there, I sat down by the window, too tired to do anything but look vaguely out over the

quiet harbour and the broad red road with the waiting carriages and sleeping drivers hunched up by them. I felt lonely almost to the point of tears.

Nor could I sleep that night; it was too hot for sleep. The stars glittered between the fronds of the palms, jet-black against the jewelled sky. These same far burning suns, I thought, are shining now into those deep gorges where the Oxus flows strongly, and on the great wall stretching over China, and on the windy monasteries of Tibet with the little ragged flags flying in the starlight, on the steaming swamps of New Guinea and on the thick forests where the Brahmaputra is rushing – on so much of this little earth of ours which to those suns is nothing. And all my old terror of the stars and space came flooding back to me.

The next day the heat was yet heavier. Outside in the scorching street the languid shopkeepers stood motionless before the doors of their shaded shops of precious stones, of sandalwood and tortoise-shell, sometimes mechanically offering sapphires or cat's-eyes to people passing by. Opposite the hotel sat a snake-charmer with his covered

basket beside him. His face, under his orange turban, was wet; the hooded cobra erect in front of him looked dusty and small.

When George came up to me and said he would take me to the Botanical Gardens in the evening, I agreed to go. We started after tea. Whiffs of garlic, whiffs of spice, came from the shops as we drove past. And at every scent and sound and sight I thought: 'This is the last time. To-morrow I shall be far away.' How familiar were the flat baskets of grain and fruit, the rough heavy jack-fruit and brinjals, smooth and smoky-purple. Familiar, too, were the piled bales of cloth with their borders of gold and vermilion. But one sight I saw was new to me: a medicine-man came down the street; his face was painted with streaks of colour and he walked clumsily on stilts. A green basket-like hat was on his head and he droned out a sort of chant. His follower carried a bowl, and the people ran out from their houses to put grain and money into it.

Presently we came out of the town on to a dusky flowery road and passed under a temple-tree in full bloom. Some of the milk-white blossoms had fallen on to the grass. I asked the

driver to stop and got out to pick them up, for they seemed to give me the very essence of this fragrant land. But as I was filling my hands with them, feeling that not one waxy petal could be left behind, a thick flat snake crawled sluggishly across the road just in front of me. Dropping all the flowers, I fled back to the carriage. George laughed when he found that I was trembling. I tried to explain that it was not the snake by itself that had frightened me, but that the snake had seemed to bring to the surface all sorts of vaguer underground fears.

'But what exactly are you frightened of?' he persisted.

'Everything,' I said helplessly. And I meant that everything in life seemed too pressing, too vivid – living and dying, loving and – worse still – not loving – everything was overwhelming – especially beneath the stupendous stars which are never hidden here.

By the gate of the Gardens there was a twisted tree of scarlet blossoms. A shaven Buddhist priest was passing along, his boy disciple walking behind him. The boy stooped, picked up one of the fallen flowers and gave it to me, and the priest

looked on with the smallest possible smile on his calm, gentle face.

There seemed to be no one inside the Gardens excepting ourselves. We went slowly up an avenue of trees, whose huge rosy flowers hung down like bells above our heads. George had been silent for a long time, and now I noticed that he was oppressed and sombre.

At the end of the avenue we came suddenly upon a big pool. Fluttering round it were moon-moths and on the edge of it grew moon-flowers. Palest moths and palest flowers! Like everything else, they were soaked in the green-gold air of the evening. Their lovely fragility seemed to become almost solid in the light that lay heavily upon the still pool. The lotus leaves looked as though they were forged out of some heavy metal – tarnished bronze, they lay upon a surface of tarnished gold. The lotus flowers were of pearl held aloft on stalks of jade. Only the white birds that flew over the water were airy and light.

As I stood there I forgot George completely, and then when I glanced at him again he was staring moodily at the ground. I realized that he was very sad, and noticed how much older

he looked than when I had known him in England.

'This time to-morrow you will be on your way home,' he said.

I felt sorry for him because of the envy in his voice; but I also half envied him. I looked up into the nutmeg trees under which we were now passing; never again should I see the yellowish nutmegs amongst the glossy green nor smell the faint smell of the dry leaves and rinds below. How much there was here that I should remember with longing as keen almost as home-sickness.

'Yes,' he went on heavily, 'you are going home. But I – I shall be old when the time comes for me to go. And it won't mean to me then what it would mean now.'

The rough gloom of his tone frightened me, but I answered as lightly as I could.

We walked on in silence and all around us there was a deep hush. Great ochre thunder-clouds had been piling themselves up in the south and now heavy single drops began to fall. In the distance we heard thunder; lightning, too, made a flicker in the air.

George pointed to a garden-house near by.

The bougainvillæa festooning the verandah looked theatrically magenta in the lurid light. Hardly had we time to take shelter before the storm crashed and broke above us. Flashes of harsh blue light lit up the swaying coco-nut trees; the palm fronds soughed and drooped under the beating shafts of rain. Our verandah was soon flooded; I stood in water with my white dress clinging wetly about me. George, leaning against the rough yellow-washed wall, appeared to be fighting some battle in his mind. I turned away from him; I watched a bedraggled jackal slink across a glade between the oleanders, looking over its shoulder in the frightened way they do.

The rain stopped with suddenness and at once the earth began to steam. The steaming air was made more languorous still by the smell of a gardenia just under the verandah. I looked down into its cool flowers that were full of shining drops.

Without turning round, I said: 'We had better go back.'

He did not seem to hear; he muttered something about the loneliness of his life. I looked out over the darkening garden. The misery in his mind linked itself with the heat and the damp and

woke in me a kind of answering nightmare. I knew something would happen; it did not surprise me when he caught up my hands and hid his face in them.

I stood still in a daze. I could do nothing, nor find any word to give him comfort. Our minds were too far apart. I pitied him; but all the time I was thinking vaguely of Jack. I thought how he, too, was exiled in these lands of fever and strain; how he, too, had wanted something of me, but not even to him had I given a crumb of comfort.

In utter misery and confusion I murmured: 'I'm wretched, too! I'm wretched, too!' And as I spoke I felt that I could not bear to live my life alone. When I was alone the pain of the whole world seemed to beat in on me. I could not be alone.

The next moment, before I could move, he had seized and kissed me. And at once everything became even more like a sick dream. I seemed to have been standing there for ever; and for ever the steamy garden would continue to steam before my eyes.

As soon as George let me go I seemed to forget

him. As we went draggingly back to the waiting carriage my mind was full of the thought of home. Absently I stared at the red road splashing red mud; at the blossoms dashed off the trees and lying torn in the way; at the soaked houses which seemed to glow with a curious intensity. 'This is the end!' I kept saying to myself. 'This is the end! To-morrow I shall be far out, steaming across the blue, blue emptiness of ocean. All this fever will die down in those long vacant days. The days will come and pass by unbrokenly; there will be nothing to trouble me. I shall be as I was upon the voyage out. I shall forget this day – and all the things I want to forget – as one forgets one's dreams.'

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

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A JUNE morning in England, and I am home again. This glittering summer rain will soon be over, and meanwhile it is peaceful to sit by the window and look out once more at all the familiar things. The chestnuts are raising their white pyramids of flowers against leaves that are the heavy blue-green of tapestry; drifts of light cow-parsley are heaped up under the tall elms, and the elms are green with little leaves still light and fresh. Down by the river the ardent marsh-marigolds are growing loosely in the boggy places, filling with yellow the trickling wet ditches. What happiness I had yesterday walking across those whispering water-meadows of juicy grass and flowers! How joyfully I saw again the curly alder trees, the willows whitening and the poplars turning silvery at every little air that rose and died away! How I rejoice in the sweet, fresh intimacy of England!

In the afternoon there was a little horse show going on in the park: flags flying round a ring, and in the sunshine the farmers' sons riding their

spirited horses – young men with strong arms and ruddy faces, their white shirts fluttering in the breeze. The heavy country crowd stood pressed against the railings, cheering, laughing, and flinching backwards whenever the horses galloped by. Now they stared at the great ample cart-horses that were led solemnly round, the owners patting the strong curved necks, the silky coats smooth over rippling muscles. The band played loudly, the little pennons blew gaily in front of the wall of trees, and above the wood rose a bank of clouds, dazzlingly white and solid against the blue of the sky. I couldn't help smiling all the time I was there: everything was so pastoral and so soothing, everything was happening in the traditional fashion, even the pale moon floating above looked as if she belonged to the place and would never wander off to lands far away.

But at the end of the day the band began to play a tune which that other band had played at those other sports at the baked cantonments in India. I saw Jack lying back in the chair by my side, outwardly so languid, but with that dreadful tenseness I always felt in him. Again the restlessness of his mind was communicated to me, and

again I felt the strain of the sun's palpitating glare. It made everything around me here seem too soft and well-arranged.

The show was over. Evening brought out from the June meadows a delicious scent which breathed through the smell of horses and trodden grass and coarse tobacco. The people moved slowly away, stopping in groups to watch the animals being led back to the village. Full of troubled thoughts, I went up the road along which I had driven on that late autumn day before starting for India. And I remembered how, when putting on my bridal dress for the play, I seemed to see the people and the places of the future circling round me, and then found myself alone in the end. Yes! that loneliness had come true: not even Jack's intensity had been able to draw me out of my own inner world with its visions of beauty which were my joy and its loneliness which was my pain.

Turning aside, I went up into the great garden near by. The evening deepened; in the empty garden the last rays of the sun fell on a bed of azaleas, shining through their fragile blossoms of lemon-yellow, apricot and pink. 'The vague fragrance of them is like this country,' I thought. 'It

can awaken no wild longing. How different from the fierce or languorous perfumes of the East. Is it already over, the happiness of returning? There are moments – and this is one – when England seems pale and mild and grey. There are no ardours here, I feel, no tigers, no madmen, no scorching suns, no stupendous snows, no ash-covered figures staring at one from a fanatical world of their own. Here everything is well understood, well tended, well loved. Even the earth is closely clothed with grass to the very foot of the trees, to the very brink of the cliffs. Here is just the easy English kindness with all the sharpness of life and feeling blunted and softened.'

I walked on, and the transience of everything on this earth – of men and beasts and flowers – stabbed my mind with a violent, sudden grief. I thought of the persons and places past which I had drifted unchanged – those chance encounters, those loose ends of friendship, those rivers pouring away and away, those places which had seemed charged with an inward significance – a significance that one possessed but for a single instant. And the flame of life did seem to me then, as to the Rajah's A.D.C., 'nothing but a candle in the wind'.

Turning, I went along a disused shrubbery-walk where the stored-up dampness of wet days breathed a chill into the air. The light filtered so scantily through the foliage that I thought the sun must have set behind clouds, but suddenly at a turn in the path the shrubs fell away and there before me lay a rich space of country drenched in exultant light. On the grassy slopes the bronzed deer were feeding amongst the bronzed patches of bracken, the massed trees stood dreaming in utter quietness through the endless June evening, and the hills beyond were turning from deep to deeper blue.

And then again, as once before in that hot moonlit station in India, there opened out a sudden way of deliverance. The disquiet of the past months fell away from me. I knew there was permanence: I felt reality. A bubble of eternity had risen through time and held me for an instant in its shining peace. 'I shall find them again,' I said to myself, 'the flowers and jungles and innocent huge beasts. I shall find them where the pattern of these things eternally dwells.'

LOTUS AND PYRAMID

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CHAPTER ONE

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I could hear Jim and Philip talking in the carriage behind while I stood in the corridor looking out of the window and the train rushed through the darkening desert. Yes, there lay the desert endlessly spread out before me, stretches of faintest brown merging into lilac. After the sun dipped below the horizon the heavens began to flare as they do in Egypt alone. Strongly and violently every sequence of orange and vermilion burned in the flat sky striped by a few level clouds, and the bronze light of evening swept over the land. Magnificent it was, and royal, but heavy with melancholy. The very name of Egypt is so weighted by years! Here one is looking at what other eyes have seen for centuries and centuries gone by – Rachel going to the well, Balaam huddled in shawls passing quickly on his ass, Reuben herding his flock. By the last rays of the solemn light I could see a train of camels, tied tail to nose, led by a limping man whose deep blue clothing waved in the wind. For ever aloof the camels stepped unevenly along with huge

baskets slung on each side of them, while a humble little group of black and white sheep trudged patiently in the dust behind.

After leaving Port Said Jim had kept telling me that we must look out for Philip at Zagazig, and we had looked for him at Zagazig and had seen him before the train stopped, a tall and rather morose-looking figure, among the yelling Arabs on the platform. He had a great many bundles, a tent and a rifle over which two of his porters were fighting and screaming. One had a barrow which the other claimed as his, and whilst they were in the middle of their argument a third suddenly wheeled it off and the others ran round and round looking for it, jabbering ceaselessly to themselves. Philip had been travelling in the Sinai peninsula; he was dusted over with sand and very sunburnt; beside us in our neat clothes and polished shoes he looked like a wild creature put into a cage with tame ones.

The restless Philip is an odd mixture of traveller and politician, a mixture that England alone produces. I could hear him now saying that he wasn't much impressed by Mount Horeb, and Jim asking about the ibex and goats in Sinai. I

turned and called to Philip to come to look at the sunset. But he wouldn't move. He had had more than enough of looking at the desert, he said.

I sighed. I wished that the feel of strange places did not press in upon me so intensely; any new sight seems to soak into one's being till nothing remains but a vivid consciousness of it; it focuses itself into an intense impression and then retreats and leaves one bare. It is exciting, but it is tiring. Why should fresh places have this strange pressure? The sight of those coral flamingoes by the shores of the melancholy lagoons, the grace of them – so unseizable, the downward bend of the soft and curving necks – and then, as we passed by, the infinite suggestion that lay in the ivory sails and slender masts of those quiet high-prowed boats moored by the shimmering water's edge! Were there boats like that tied under the walls of Carthage? they filled me with longing, the longing to possess just that sight, that clear loveliness again.

But it was time for a meal now and people began to move down the corridor to the restaurant car, and in there the scene was animated enough and bright with lights. Through the rattling of

the train and the rattling of the plates scraps of talk in French, in English and Turkish were borne to our ears; hurrying Egyptian waiters brought quails, oranges and dates; there were soldiers coming back from leave who had the air of old hands, Egyptian officials, English and American tourists, and a sprinkling of sallow-faced men that Jim lumped all together as Dagos.

Cairo station was full and noisy, but Jim, who had been stationed there before our marriage, guided us through the garrulous crowd that jostle on every side and very soon we were in an *arabeah* and had left all the bustle behind us; incessantly our driver in his fez flicked and holloaed at the horses till they were galloping wildly through the empty streets where the shapes of mosques and slim minarets stood sharply outlined against a sky immense with stars.

How tired I was that evening! The last thing I remember was standing in the hall, while Jim was talking at the office, and seeing through an open door a shining floor being polished by a row of Egyptian servants. I looked at them entranced for they were just like a living frieze; all in a row they leant forward with their dark faces,

so immobile, bent downwards. On and on they advanced polishing the great floor, the red fezes, the white stooping forms with red sashes tied round them, the thin brown feet moving slowly together in a straight line.

CHAPTER TWO

*

I AM sitting on the window-sill in my room eating sugar-cane. It is so juicy and fresh one could go on nibbling at it all day. The Soudanese servant, in a green cap and full green trousers, just now brought in a basket-full cut up into pieces, and set it down on the floor with a wide smile. My window is high above the ground; beneath, the whitewashed walls of the hotel ache in the midday glare; across the sand I can see the two great Pyramids, all their colour bleached out by the fierce light. But early this morning they looked very different. Just as the sun rose I came to this window and saw them standing there drowsily splendid, a tigerish gold set on the tigerish sand.

When first I drew near the Great Pyramid it was with a feeling of real shrinking. My mind was bludgeoned and I lifted bewildered eyes; it was almost painful to realize that this was the work of men's slight hands. One wanders along the base, wondering inanely at the vast blocks so perfectly placed along the bottom courses, one stops at the corners to gaze inanely at the fabulous line

that goes slanting up and up into the sapphire blue.

The sun beat down on that stupendous slope of stone, and up on it a scattering of tiny men were crawling like sluggish flies; and presently I too started to climb up; we were making for the small opening that leads downwards to the King's Chamber. We reached it at last and the Bedouin in fluttering garments who was our guide slid down the polished shaft, at the bottom of which he lit some magnesium wire which showed a narrow gleaming passage going steeply down into the core. The unnatural light played pallidly upon the smooth dark stone as we followed after him. How hot it was in the thick darkness! As we plunged deeper into that stifling fastness of stone an awful oppression seized me, and at last when we came to the solemn bat-infested chamber which contains the royal sarcophagus the sense of the weight pressing downwards became almost more than I could bear. There was something terrible in the thought of the monstrous walls that surround the little empty tomb of sombre reddish granite.

That was my first impression, but later the pyramids grew very familiar. In the evening of

the day before we started up the Nile I found my way to a little pyramid, half ruined, near by, and I climbed on to a rock at its base to sit and draw there. A tiny Arab boy came along behind. He was dressed in black with an old black cloak and had a round dirty-white cap on his head. His face was round too, and his broad smile always ready. When I sat on the sand he jerked off his ragged cloak in an instant and spread it on the ground, and while I sketched he sat holding my paint-box in one hand and a paint-brush in the other.

He had some friends who joined us; a boy from Tunis with pale golden-brown skin, and a diminutive donkey-boy dressed in a stained garment of yellow who dragged the dusty donkey behind him without even one necklet of beads to adorn it. He was seven years old, he said; his donkey looked a hundred. His small wrinkled face was as yellow as his dress, and his name, he told me with some importance as he lit a cigarette, was Abbas. I thought I should never forget that preternaturally old little creature who never smiled but puffed brazenly at his cigarette.

The boy from Tunis said that he could divine

the future. He stared at me and then drew the sun's disk with rays spreading all round it in the powdery sand. Stooping lower and lower over the circle of his sun with an absorbed face he kept counting these rays, and muttering words that the others tried to translate. Having reached his conclusion he straightened himself and pronounced, 'Not happy, if too much thinking.' I thanked him but replied that I did not agree. For a moment, after taking my coin, he looked at me in silence, then kicking away the traces of his sun with his hard feet, he walked off apparently heading for the empty desert.

The plain stretching away below us had a veil, a bloom, on it now. The stripes of shrill green and yellow mustard, so garish in the full daylight, were a little dimmed. Far away, with a low line of pale blue hills running behind them, lay the four pyramids of Sakhara. Far away and faint they looked, wedge-shaped, rosy on the sunlit side and lilac in the shadow; the desert below shimmered in violet and gold and a group of lebbek trees with three palms amongst them stood up against it purple-black. A sound of monotonous singing drifted up through the dreamy evening

air. It came from the valley below, and a few moments later a straggling procession appeared. I asked my little Arab what it was. He spread out his hands helplessly.

'Man getting married?' I suggested.

'No,' said the boy gravely, trying to explain. 'No; man finished.'

We watched the little file draw nearer; the funeral was evidently that of a poor man. It was led by a group of mourners in scanty, filthy garments who looked like beggars; two or three of them held one another's hands, for they were blind; and as they hobbled along they chanted in cracked voices the familiar chant to Allah. Next came another throng who were rather better clothed. 'Friends,' said the boy. There followed a company wearing turbans of dull indigo and carrying rather forlorn black flags. These, my companion told me, were 'Darwish'; and he pointed out the Koran which, under a piece of silk, was being borne along immediately in front of a sort of stretcher-bier. This was carried by four unconcerned-looking men, and upon it one could see the stiff dead form beneath a faded Persian shawl which was its only covering. After it came

women with dishevelled hair and idly wandering looks, who in forced voices kept up a ceaseless wail, and this ended the procession.

A Mohammedan donkey-boy who could talk English had joined us and he too watched, leaning against his donkey with one arm round its neck. I pointed at the procession that was passing out of sight and said, 'Man finished.'

He looked at me surprised.

'Not finished,' was his reply, spoken with unexpected vigour. 'He good man – he Mohammedan; he will be white bird in heaven; he will drink sweet waters, he will find the Tuba tree of gold, he will have a horse. There will be honey and milk and fountains of wine, and to him will be given a woman of Paradise who lives in a big pearl. He will never get old, and afterwards when Israfel shall sound his trumpet he will have again his camels.'

His camels! Well, paradise would not be paradise to him without them, I suppose. And my eyes fell upon a row of turbaned men who had come up silently and were sitting on a ridge of sand a little way off. They had their camels still! The strange contemptuous animals were couched on

the ground near them and, with their heads held high, dark against the burning horizon, they looked as if they would be disdainful even of Paradise. Pieces of cloth, patched and striped, orange, maroon, and plum colour, were thrown about the men and their beasts. The light touched them and the pointed saddles with a fierce glow.

'So he will have his camels again,' I said, turning once more to the boy. 'And what about his wife?'

At this question he smiled rather scornfully and shook his head; then jumping on his donkey he thumped it with his fist and off they went down the incline.

My little Arab glanced at me with rather an apologetic air as he gathered together the sketching things. Standing up, he drew his thin cape round him and led the way down the crumbling stones, for it was time to go home.

CHAPTER THREE

★

I COULD hear the voices of the others getting fainter and fainter as they passed into a further hall of the temple. I could hear too, the confused jabber of the donkey-boys outside; they were playing a game of knucklebones in the sun-drenched sand; the donkeys were all tethered against a wall, and the blue-smocked boys sat round in a ring a little way off. Through the high gateway I could see two of them, who had been quarrelling, now rolling about in the sand, laughing, and the dust rising up like a whirlwind about their brown kicking legs.

I stood in the sun alone; that silent court with its austere colonnade was deserted by all but me. In one place a golden bank of sand showed above the wall of the temple and a yellow pariah dog stood on the top of the soft sloping mound. It was one of the usual thin dogs of Egypt, a forlorn race; it stretched itself, it scratched, suspiciously it looked at me again and finally lay down on the hot ground.

This temple, I remembered, was dedicated to

Horus, the young sun-god. Here was still the golden sun, the golden sand, the golden-coloured walls, and above it was stretched the splendid blue of the African day. As I looked up I saw an eagle slowly wheeling round above; how solitary it looked in that empty sky with not a fleck of cloud! I leant against one of the sun-warmed columns covered with the cryptic signs of that vanished religion – the key of life, the key to the underworld – and watched the eagle swoop and swoop over the great wall; higher and lower it circled in smooth sweeps, its shadow crossing over the towers and the outer courts, over the passages, and over the dog that now lay, stretched out full-length, asleep.

All the voices have died away; even the donkey-boys are quiet at last. How heavy is the silence! Heavily the shadows lie in solemn lines across the ground, soft with dust like gold. Here in the brooding stillness of rich noonday I seem once more to be caught in one of those miraculous pauses in time when all the significance of a place is condensed and complete. 'At this moment,' I thought, 'this place is my own. Nothing can take it from me.'

Again I looked round at the signs on the walls. For ever the same ideas! the same hopes and fears, then and now! Always the search for the key to true life, always the journey of the soul, always the altar-stone! My mind went back to the words of an Egyptian Jew with whom I had made friends on the boat on the way up the river. I was sitting on the deck turning over the leaves of a book of inscriptions when he passed near me. Glancing down at the page he stopped and said:

'Shall I tell you what that means? It is a hymn to Ra written thirty centuries ago. It runs like this:

'May I arrive at the land of eternity;
May I be united to the land of everlastingness!
Behold thou hast ordered it for me, my lord.
May I be joined with the shining beings, holy and perfect!
May I come forth with them to see thy beauties!'

He paused, then added with a half-smile: 'That is my hope too, but I want to realize it here while I am living on this earth.' I looked at him surprised; he didn't seem of the stuff of which mystics are made; his plump broad face under his fez was

decidedly devoid of expression. I had talked to him once or twice before and gathered that he was well off and had a house at Nice where he spent the winter. All the time, he said, he was 'searching,' and when I asked him for what exactly, he answered that he was always hoping to catch again the glimpses – which came to him only too rarely – of a world where all was coherent and all was one. Why did he prize this so much? I questioned; and he replied that since that consciousness had dawned upon him, nothing else in life appeared worth while. All the world now seemed but a shadow of that reality – transient and immaterial beside that concrete and convincing insight. Sometimes, he went on, he felt himself again upon the verge of the longed-for experience, and then it eluded him.

I thought Nice an odd place in which to wait for a revelation; but he answered that it made no difference where one was; he also spent a good deal of time at Monte Carlo. 'Yes,' he finished laughing, 'even when I am at the roulette tables listening to the croupiers I remember and hope.'

Every man's life-history, according to his idea, was prearranged; we were all launched upon the

same journey, only some were more conscious of their destiny than others.

'And should we all be preoccupied like you? so intent on this goal?' I queried, for I felt a little oppressed by his urgent sense of fate.

He shrugged his shoulders.

'If a man's hand is put to the plough. . . . Is not that in your scriptures? Yes, and it is true.' I made no answer. Perhaps he read doubtfulness in my face. 'We believe what we deserve to believe,' he said with a sudden gesture of indifference and continued his march up and down the deck.

The thought of the Egyptian Jew kept coming into my mind now as I stood alone in the overflowing sunshine. It was very quiet there. A lizard ran in and out of the sun-baked stones in short darts and then lay for long dead pauses as still as the stones, with eye fixed and alert. Bees blundered about humming and seeking for flowers. One plant only at my feet offered them any blossom; the others were all ragged little weeds. But there was this one, spread over with flat white flowers, and on it reposed a silvery butterfly. It was large and frail; it lay there, spreading its gleaming wings of most delicately patterned grey.

Wraith-like creature! I thought; wraith-like existence among those never-changing stones!

Presently a flock of little birds flew into the court, twittering and dusting themselves in the warm sand that rose round them in tiny golden eddies. Their busy twittering woke me out of my trance, and slowly I walked past them into the next hall where the columns stand in double rank on either side, and then into the further hall, each one growing darker than the one before, each with its shadows more velvety black than the last. Most sombre of all, however, were the priests' chambers that held a shudder in their long-chilled air. I hurried through them, fearful of the wings of the bats flapping in the gloom of their ceilings, and came at last into the innermost place of all, a small sanctuary with its altar. Here the roof is painted a smoky hue and in the middle of the heavy darkness a square piece of black granite is set upon the floor; but the altar is empty, no god is worshipped here now.

The massive outer walls of the temple are still whole at Edfu; one can look right down the open passages that run all the length of the building; one can walk unseen along those mighty corridors

between calm golden walls incised with histories of gods and warriors and kings. There is no painting here, no colour but the scorched bright amber of the stone, and the pure cobalt of the sky above. I wandered about by myself without the fear of being alone, which haunts one beneath the monstrous columns of Karnac. This building is neither stupendous nor strange, and centuries of quiet burial beneath the drifting sand have kept it from falling into ruin. It stands now as it stood then, its beauty unchanged, its shadows clear-cut and distinct under the fierce insistent sunlight as they were of old.

As I passed between the towers of the gateway which lift their splendid sloping sides high into the blue I tried to imagine the scene on a feast day when decorated poles were fixed on the walls, and the coloured banners streamed fluttering against the sky. In the court the arrogant painted priests assembled in their brightly fringed robes of fine linen. I suppose they had the same proud mouths and delicate oval faces that one still sees here and there among the living as well as in the sculptured dead. Did they stand in solemn order, their shadows sharp upon the ground, with the

vivid walls behind, all fresh with tints of daffodil, turquoise, and pale vermilion? and the King, would he be there with the leopard-skin thrown over his shoulder and the sun striking dazzling on the golden cobra with lifted head that made his royal head-dress? Yes, and his arms are heavy with bracelets and ornaments set with lapis-lazuli and emeralds.

The stones of the stairs leading on to the roof are worn by the feet of men who walked there thousands of years ago. I climbed them now, going in the steps of those who carried offerings to the sun-god, and stood looking down on the wide empty view. There is no town here now; nothing moves at this somnolent hour, only down a path through the doura and the maize a man in a yellow-striped burnous walks slowly along carrying a squawking turkey blue with rage.

CHAPTER FOUR

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An ivory sail, pointed, tapering, moved quietly along in front of the tinted sky. Very slowly and smoothly it moved, and the calm river reflected the calm sky in all the purity of its primrose and faint green washes. It was the idle evening hour; I watched the sail until it drifted out of sight; then another boat passed, and this one had a high prow that had been newly painted a vivid scarlet. It was piled up with dusty sacks and a group of men sat smoking on the top of them. They shouted greetings to our crew, but our crew made no answer, for they were busy watching a dance in the bows of the boat. There was only one dancer, and he was balancing a glass bottle on his head. The others were squatting round him in a ring upon the deck; one had a small tom-tom, another in a sort of trance was beating time by striking two bottles with an old knife, the rest were chanting monotonously upon three notes and dreamily clapping their hands.

The dancer was a thick-set youth whom I had

often watched carrying huge boxes roped together on his back. His strength was amazing; bent double he would climb the steep Nile bank looking, with the rope over his forehead, as powerful as a horse straining at a heavy weight. Now with a vacantly smiling face, he was absorbed in an odd slow dance that moved his hips more than his feet. After a little of this, with the bottle still balanced upon his head, he sat himself down upon the deck; then next lay down full-length, the bottle still in its place, and finally sprang up again. The sleepy accompaniment grew louder at this feat, the tom-tom player struck his tom-tom more heavily and some one threw him a few piastres.

While this was going on Philip and the Egyptian Jew were pacing up and down. Philip, lithe and restless, moved with long strides as though he could go on for ever, and his words came out indifferent and jerky between the puffs of his pipe. The Egyptian had a measured tread and talked in measured sentences. As I looked at them I wondered, as often before, at the different aspects worn by life according to race and faith. The Egyptian had said to me the evening before: 'We

experience just so much as we are capable of experiencing. Everything depends on where we direct our consciousness, within or without. That alone which we have within can we see without.' What, I asked myself, was the dancer with the bottle experiencing as he went up and down the Nile.

A little later the Egyptian came to me and asked if the 'gentleman' was English. 'Yes, certainly,' I replied, 'passionately English, just as I am. Why not?'

'He is interested in religion, although he has no faith, and the English are not as a rule interested in religion.'

I smiled.

'At any rate,' he went on, 'they know very little about Oriental faiths, although, to be sure, their own is an Oriental faith. – Religion I think is not the English genius.'

I asked him with some curiosity what he considered the English genius was.

'That,' he deliberated, 'that is most difficult to say. Their genius is unaccountable, obscure, in many cases unaware of itself. Yes, you are a very poetic people in spite of your Empire.' He

smiled at me. 'You have differing geniuses always springing up in your little country.'

I sat there listening to him and absently watching the stiff archaic procession that winds every evening along the Nile bank, – women erect with great water-jars upon their heads, blunt-shaped donkeys going in single file, old men with staves to lean on, children running or staring in a daze. . . .

That night there was a full moon, and Jim, who was in boisterous spirits, suggested that we should have a donkey race. It was not a bad idea, for the donkeys at Luxor are surely the best in the world – so big, so strong, so full of energy! A few minutes later we were mounted and galloping along at a great pace across the blanched sand. The donkeys were white and we too were dressed in white, and behind us came the dark-clad donkey-boys yelling and capering, their shadows patterned fantastically upon the ground.

Each claimed that his own donkey had won, and when all the excitement was over we paused to see where we were. We stood in the midst of level fields lit brightly by the moon. Slowly now and

quietly we rode on through the unstirring warmth, through the soft velvety air. Our path wandered among crops each one of which offered up a different scent; we passed a fallen obelisk, and skirted by mud villages where dogs bayed at the moon. Desolate did those places seem with the dim forms of dogs, their throats uplifted, standing on the broken-down walls, and the heavy silence torn by the harsh bark, bark, bark.

It was late when we retraced our steps, passing back through one of the villages that had been made clamorous by the dogs a little while ago, and where now everything was silent. Everything, too, had the same colour under the chastening moon, – brown walls, brown huts built of Nile mud, and underfoot the brown sand. The place had an unkempt look – the look of a rubbish heap – which is common to Oriental villages. Our narrow path meandered between the poor dwellings, some with nothing better than straw laid across them for a roof, some with the walls crumbling away, and not one that could boast of a chimney. Once or twice I heard a murmur of voices from behind a door, sometimes the glare of a fire fell across the way,

and through one low archway I saw a bare room and in it two wrinkled old women huddled together on the hard ground. A mess of food was in front of them which they were pushing into their mouths, and there they sat mumbling among the broken pots and refuse and darkness that surrounded them.

In the middle of the village we came upon an open space where there grew a great tree, and here to our surprise we found a company of elders gathered together. It was strange to come suddenly upon that circle of grave men sitting cross-legged upon the ground. They were clothed in black, with white turbans on, and their talk was solemn and low. As we rode slowly by they stopped speaking and looked at us. What had their talk been about? I wondered. The price of grain, the lowness of the river, or were they judging a village dispute? It was quite a long way before we met another human creature, and he, curiously enough, was the village butcher. He was standing by a kid that he had just killed; its carcase hung from a tripod and he hacked pieces from it while a purchaser waited, shrouded and silent, near by.

No one else did we meet in that village except one blind man who was being led gently along, his hands outstretched in front of him. The moonlight fell upon nothing that was not dusty, parched and dry – pallid rubbish heaps against the mud walls, emaciated dogs asleep in the powdery sand, broken potsherds and withered palm-leaves that crackled under-foot.

When we came back again into the fields the donkey-boys huddled together close behind us as if in fear. Egyptians, it seems, believe in doubles, so perhaps they were afraid of meeting an apparition. It was nearly midnight now and seemed to be time to go back to the boat. But Philip was restless and could not be persuaded. It had come into his head that there was an orange garden near here which he had been to once before and must see again. He led us unresisting this way and that, and suddenly we found ourselves outside a high wall in which there was a gate that led into the darkness. As we dismounted the scent of orange blossom was wafted towards us and the next moment we passed through the gate into a cool and perfumed gloom, into a night that belonged not to this desert Egypt, but to India on a moonlit

Indian night. In the dark shadow of a shelter there sat an old man who let us pass by without a word. In silence we took the moon-dappled path that ran between orange trees and vines. The night air was flooded with the heavy fragrance of the blossom; the waxy-white flowers brushed coldly against our faces as we went by. Upon the vines falling in festoons over their poles the moon shone down with a miraculous brightness; it shone on thickets, silvery blue, of tall sugar-cane and on the round fruit hanging thick upon the boughs. I wandered on by myself and came to the river-bank. On the green water there floated a little boat piled high with lemons and oranges. The boat swayed slowly from side to side on the olive-coloured Nile. The drowsy boat-man who was sitting in it had lit a lantern, the yellow light fell on the heaped-up fruit. He could not see me in the darkness under the trees as I stood there watching him without a sound. A striped hankerchief was twisted round his head; beyond him, across the river, endlessly still the desert stretched away under the moon. I thought he was asleep when all at once he began singing to himself, – singing, it seemed in his dreams. And

that low whining sound filled me with intense curiosity to know what was within *him* and what experiences *he* had gathered from outside life.

CHAPTER FIVE

*

VERY early this morning Philip and I went for a ride. It was cool; and peacefully we cantered along the little paths that wind through the corn where the walls of Thebes once stood. How brightly green are those fields of corn! Larks were singing their song high up in the air; there was the rich humming of a myriad bees and lupins filled the dewy morning with the smell of honey. Our donkeys went lollopping along; past fields of bean and fields of vetch and stretches of lupin looking mistily white and blue in the young sunlight and moist shade; even the ditches were full of the spiked flowers of lupins. Far away the outline of the hills appeared as a wash of clear translucent green above the rosy mist. The bloom of dawn lay over all the land making every colour delicious in my eyes – even the familiar turquoise beads round the donkey's neck and the donkey-boy's one garment of washed-out blue.

I had on a blue dress too and I picked a bit of lilac lupin to stick into it so that the warm perfume should be with me all the time. Then the

donkey-boy gathered me a bunch; his was an arrangement of yellow daisies and white clover with one spike of bean-flower stuck stiffly in the middle. Philip scolded me, saying that I encouraged him to talk, and I answered that I never could resist anybody who loved making little posies.

After a while the donkey-boy fell behind; he had stopped to recite the sunrise prayer. When he had caught us up again he explained to me he had to pray five times a day. Another rider, too, had stopped to pray; but now he came quickly along the narrow path, so narrow that we had to brush against the dew-drenched maize to let him pass. He trotted along without stirrups or reins, his blue clothes fluttering out behind.

Already from a long distance we could see the huge statues of Memnon brooding over the sunny plain. We rode past a sakiya with its dripping wheel and quiet oxen resting in the sun; we passed a herd of black goats and kids led by a woman who, as we came up, held a fold of her black draperies across her face. A boy then approached, idly driving before him a sheep with a coat of curly bronze wool. He sang, he stopped to look

at us, and he stopped to look at a group of children who sat in the shade of the swishing sugar-cane. They smiled, lifting their dark eyes shyly as we rode past; the smaller of them were clad only in beads and girdles of fresh green grass; chewed bits of sugar-cane were littered all around them.

We lingered a little where the Colossi stonily sit, gazing out over the land with strange battered calm, their shadows stretching far over the corn that grows thickly to the very base of their thrones. Not far beyond them is the limit of the irrigated ground, and here we found a camel and an ox yoked together ploughing up the caked soil along the last line of living green. Arid and dusty, the earth flew up behind them. In front of us now was a scorched strip of desert, a stone-strewn waste backed by the tawny precipices of the Libyan mountains, and in that mountain face are the Tombs of the Kings.

It was too hot to hurry the donkeys and slowly we rode up towards the ravine which leads to the tomb where Amenhotep still lies. In the ravine itself the heat and glare grew even more intense. The sun beat down with gathering strength upon the crags of yellow and orange limestone, whose

jagged edges quivered above us against the blazing sky. Our narrow path was walled in by ribs of rock which threw out all the heat. At last, in the bare face of the cliff we came to a small door. I thanked heaven, saying to myself that we should find darkness inside; surely, too, inside it would be cool? But I was wrong, for after jumping off our donkeys and leaving the guide behind, we plunged into a yet heavier heat. Deeper we went and deeper into an oven of stone, – down long sloping corridors and down steps, past an empty painted chamber and past a well, then down another stretch of stifling dark until right in the heart of the rock we reached the crypt where the king lies.

The tomb has been lit by electricity, and a harsh light now strikes down on the long-dead face. I looked at it with astonishment; it is wonderful that the mummied flesh, the withered tendons, the brittle bones, should have kept so royal an air. Yes, in spite of time and our desecrations, Amenhotep reposes with kingly calm in his ponderous sarcophagus of sandstone. The silent centuries have come and gone and he has lain alone in the sweltering darkness, suffering no change that

seems of any account. How noisily the years have passed by outside, how peacefully for him! No change! Only his stained wrappings have become rags, and some one has put in his folded hands a tiny bunch of flowers that have become skeletons. 'Well,' they made me think, 'flowers were the same, I suppose, in Thebes and Babylon. Poppies in Nineveh and jonquils in Tyre! Solomon saw the bright anemones of Judea growing scarlet and purple amongst the stones; and here are Amenhotep and I each with our little bunch.' I looked at the flagging handful which I still held; the dying fragrance of the clover hung heavily in that stagnant air. Maybe, I thought, as we walked back along the soundless passage, this king liked the honey smell of warm clover too when he was outside in the sun.

On the way home we talked about flowers and Philip said that the lotus was the only one that he connected with Egypt. The lotus was imitated in the temple columns; it was always a lotus that appeared in the paintings; blue and white garlands of lotus were made for the guests at feasts, wreaths for the women's heads and necklaces for the men. And then he went on to tell me about a

legendary lotus, a rosy one, that was supposed to have grown in the land long ago. And in my mind during that hot ride I saw cool lakes with huge round leaves floating on the water and that fabulous flower rising up amongst them, – a flower with enormous petals in double row, ruby petals curved inward like a cup. And its scent mounting up to the sun like incense, mounting up as an offering to Ra; and perhaps, I mused, it was when Ra ceased to be worshipped that the lotus became extinct.

CHAPTER SIX

*

It had been a hateful day; some oppression lay on it since very early when from my cabin, as I was dressing, I saw a man killing a cockerel on the bank not far from the boat.

In the cool clear light of early morning he squatted there with a shawl drawn over his head, while, like a cat with a mouse, he spent as long as he could half strangling the bird, then letting it go; half cutting its throat and then letting it totter about bleeding. Moving blindly from this side to that it made feeble attempts to escape, and over and over again, after it had fluttered a little way the man idly stretched out his thin hands red with blood and caught it, and half sleepily continued his torturing game. The other chickens fed unconcernedly on amongst the rough grain that had been scattered for them; a passing boy paused to watch and laugh and poke the dying cockerel with his foot. Overhead the sky shone a soft luminous blue, the mild air blew freshness about the scene, limpidly the sun looked down on our 'light bitter world of wrong.'

Some hours later we set out, Jim and I riding

in front, Philip following at a little distance behind. We were going up a mountain from which one got a distant view over the brassy landscape of Nubia. It was past noon when at last we reached our goal, a ledge on a craggy cliff facing the south. Arid was the land immediately around us, a confusion of jagged peaks and twisted ravines. It might have all been cast in some heavy metal, so hard and so massive was its surface spread out under a sky hazy with heat.

After waiting there for a while to let the donkeys have a rest we started in silence to come back. A dry wind had sprung up which blew the dust round us in eddies; it got into our eyes, the flies buzzed round our heads and we were shaken by each step the donkeys took as they jolted down the steep rock-filled defile. We passed some whitened bones by the path; we passed a dead crow lying feet upward, and a little later I saw a hawk sitting in a cleft of a rock, its yellow eye fixed and unafraid. Beyond this there was no life to be seen till we got down to the level desert land again, and here it was that we came upon the strolling players.

The last green tint of evening was still lingering in the western sky, and sharp against its strange

clarity there stood out a train of camels which had halted for the night near the ancient caravan route through northern Africa. As we came nearer we heard music and singing. The evening meal was being prepared and round the fire were grouped men, camels, donkeys, and a few black goats. The grunting camels sprawled on the ground, their burdens beside them, and each time one of them moved there sounded the clank of a bell. Round the biggest fire and lit by its fitful flame the musicians had gathered and the light fell on their painted lutes, drums, and tambourines.

In the midst of them a blind man sat singing, and by his side, playing a reed pipe, was a boy with eyes set wide apart, and a white cloth tied like a wimple round his music-haunted face. The singer was young and powerfully built but very thin, and as he sat there his wasted form wrapped round in a coarse cloth of striped yellow and crimson, he looked the embodiment of sad helplessness. His raw voice rose and fell to the odd inconclusive cadence of one of the chants of the East. Listlessly the song repeated its quavering phrases; the trembling half-tones recurred over and over again as though the music had too little heart even to

cease. But darkness was creeping over the desert swiftly now; the evening meal was ready and hooded black shapes moved here and there as one fire after another blazed out in the grape-blue blur of the night.

Sitting on my donkey I remained staring at the shadowy scene – the background of camels, the sightless singer, the Arabs squatting hunched round their cooking-pots, sometimes plunging ravenous hands into steaming bowls of rice, sometimes breaking off hunks from the blocks of coarse dates. But the night breeze began to blow chill, and we were just about to ride on when there was a movement from the back of the ring. One of the players tossed his tom-tom into the air, and caught it again and beat it louder and louder, then suddenly into the reddest glare there stepped a monstrous figure. It was a dwarf as black as ebony. Squat and gorilla-like he stood and surveyed his audience with an odd twisted grin. In his jerkin of patchwork hung with frayed purple tassels he reminded me of a richly clothed grotesque by Velasquez, or better of a negro carving of some misshapen god. Certainly there was no sadness or self-pity in that crooked grin of

his. Suddenly, without further ado, he sprang into hideous buffoonery, grimacing and tumbling about in a fashion positively gruesome. His capers grew so wild that they won the attention of even those indifferent spectators; even that callous crowd paused in its eating to watch the jibbering whirling antics.

All that day, as I have said, life had seemed dark to me, and now the darkness became thick indeed. This brutal scene – this tragic dancer – this merciless land! Stiff with the growing terror I could not take my eyes from the dwarf. In total silence now he was juggling with some leaden balls, but all at once an ague seemed to take possession of him; he began to shake all over, his eyes were turned upwards showing only the whites, and his great mouth gaped widely. How dark, how harsh life is, I repeated to myself, how dark, how insane! 'Come away,' I heard Jim saying to me in a low voice, and Philip added something I didn't catch, for just at that moment the juggler groaned, and groaning fell to the ground where he lay rigid and still.

Philip pushed through the ring of onlookers and I heard him ask a question, but the men, while

they went on eating, only laughed and shook their heads; the dwarf, it appeared, often had these fits and they were taken as merely adding spice to the show. A boy came forward with a trickling goat-skin and standing across the poor distorted body in its clownish patchwork, swished water over the black limbs. We pulled our donkeys' heads round, called to our donkey-boys, and rode away as fast as we could. As we did so there arose from far amongst the rocks the coughing yelp of a hyena, and just as one thought or one note will sometimes melt a scene into a pattern of beauty, so the horror of this scene was focused in my mind by that hyena's blood-curdling questing howl on the still night air. It made my heart beat so heavily that I could hardly breathe. I looked up into the sky and a shooting star slid slowly across it, leaving a blurred trail of light.

CHAPTER SEVEN

*

I SHIVERED as we rowed across the steely ruffled river before sunrise. A chill breeze was blowing; still half-asleep I sat huddled in a woollen cape. For most of the night a fox had barked near the boat and the barking had sounded very dreary. It made me think of the striped hyena I had seen one day going along a rocky gorge, harsh creature running quickly between the boulders, its high shoulders covered with coarse stiff hair of yellowish grey. The fox had barked on with a dreary persistence that had brought me visions of the loneliness of this place where there is no sign of human habitation – nothing but the great wan river that goes swirling past its banks of mud and sand.

We were crossing the Nile at this silent hour to visit the vast rock temple of Abou Simbel on the western bank. This temple is cut deep into the mountain-side, its halls and chambers having been hollowed out of the heart of the stone. The whole front of the cliff has been smoothed away, and slopes grandly down to a square terrace; and here are carved four towering statues of Rameses,

each figure seated on a high throne which is also hewn out of the living rock.

There was only starlight as yet, but the stars were growing faint as if they felt the approach of dawn. Little by little I could make out the features of the flat-nosed Sudanese from whom we had hired the boat. In the pallid light his upturned face with its purple-black skin and bulging eyes looked as if it were made of stone and would be cold to touch; his massive hands grasping the oars, the thick thumbs curling backwards, were like hands of stone too. Now and then he grunted out a few guttural words to the men rowing behind him. As the light gathered strength I gazed across the river. How grey are the mountains of Nubia! How dead-white the sand looks before the sun has touched it into ivory! And the fields of corn, how cold they lie before the dawn! Now as I looked towards the cliffs I was just able to make out where the temple stood, as the place was marked by the enormous but still shadowy figures on each side of the small black door.

A few moments later our boat grated on the sand. Shaking ourselves from our rugs we

scrambled stiffly ashore. Long ago the river used to wash the terrace edge, but its course is different now, and we had to trudge through wet young corn and a patch of onions all silvery with dew before we reached the terrace. Standing there I looked upwards; the light was still faint and cold but every line of the statues above me was now distinct. They sit, those mighty figures, their hands upon their knees, staring with blind lidless eyes over the river and over the dun desert. A gigantic patience and passivity are on those faces battered by time, but they still keep their grandeur.

Soon a warmer light welled up in the eastern sky flushing the cliff of pinkish rock and transfiguring the pale banks of sand that sloped down on each side of it. The temple is turned towards the east, so that on midsummer day – and only on that day – the first ray of sunlight falls directly through the small black door, passes through the dark halls and strikes upon the altar in the innermost shrine. We walked into the first of the rock-hewn vaults and found within a chill more penetrating than the chill outside. The huge painted columns loomed dimly and beyond there

was another hall with pillars that were undecorated. Passing through this we plunged deeper still into the cold dark body of the mountain, and came into another chamber, a smaller one, which is the innermost sanctuary. In it there is a rock-hewn support for the Boat of the Dead, and behind are four seated figures of the gods that were worshipped here. Two of the figures are painted red, one blue, and one has been left a ghostly white. How immobile, how dead, how stony they are sitting in the unutterable stillness; their presence strikes a chill into the heart.

I stood there waiting, and presently there came what I was waiting for. A quivering ray of gold shone in through the narrow door. It fell not upon the shrine itself, but on one of the four watchers seated behind. For a few moments more I lingered, but the blessed light filled me with a great longing to escape from this life-sapping darkness – irresistibly I was drawn out into the open golden air where the heavenly warmth could fall upon one's face and be felt stealing through one's stiffened limbs.

For a while we sat upon a ledge of rock in the

sun and then Jim and Philip went off to look for an inscription cut by some Greek soldiers upon the giant leg of one of the statues towering up behind us. Greek soldiers, marching past before the days of Nebuchadnezzar, had carved it there; some idle soldiers when the day's work was done perhaps, who had nothing else to do that evening in this strange place. What did the lively Greeks make of this curious Egyptian race with its ponderous architecture, its hideous animal-faced gods, its monotonous hieroglyphics, its everlasting preoccupation with the tomb? In other lands it is the palaces or the temples that tell of the vanished people; in Egypt even the temple is dominated by the tomb. The Egyptians, Philip often said, were religious but unimaginative; they thought of even immaterial things in concrete and massive terms. Their early ideas went on through every stage of their history to the very end, incredibly the same! And yet, unlike me, he admired the heavy strength of Egypt more than the classic beauty of Greece or the rich and curly exuberance of the Assyrians.

The sun grew hot now; it was very peaceful waiting there, munching some dates. I could hear

the voices of the others as they climbed about. How fine the sand was – pale almost to whiteness; I poured it through and through my hands and watched two hoopoes that had perched on a boulder near by. The light played and glimmered on their smooth feathers as they moved their crested heads quickly up and down. Then a kite appeared, sailing in long sweeps across the dazzling empty sky. Then three women went by one behind the other, with pots of reddish clay balanced on their heads. They stared at me. Their faces were coarse, their lips thick, and looking at them I thought how much alike they all were in their black garments.

Philip came strolling round the base of the statue and lay down in the sand near me. 'What are you thinking about?' he asked, putting out his hands for some dates. I answered that I was picturing the churning cataracts of the Soudan which the river had passed through before it flowed on so quietly in front of us here.

'I hated it farther up its course, the Nubian Nile!' he said, while he piled up little castles of sand. 'Those feverish mournful places, marshes stretching mile after mile with nothing to be seen

there but hippopotamuses – just the top of a flat grey head and a blunt snout. I hated their clumsiness as they lunged up on to the low banks – their stone-coloured bodies and their tiny eyes. And there are long mud flats where the torpid crocodiles lie heavily in the sun, keeping their mouths open towards any wind that blows. And still farther south the river widens out into a great swamp; I was there one night at full moon. The red flood waters of the Sobat were pouring into the main stream, bringing a confusion of broken trees and refuse and the dead bodies of animals. It was a nightmare – the turbid water, the stagnant air full of the hum of insects, the smell of swamp; one place was alive with hippos moving amongst the rushes, and hanging above it all was the enormous red disk of the moon.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

★

The naked black boys run panting across the sand and up the slope towards us. They have been swimming and shooting the rapids of the second cataract, and now, having each been given a coin, they fling themselves down for a rest.

I, too, lie outstretched in a patch of shade on the top of a great rock that stands high above the surrounding country. Jim and Philip, their eyes shut, are resting in the shadow of another ledge. We made our start many hours ago, at break of dawn, to avoid the heat of the day. For part of the way our boatmen rowed, and sometimes they had to tow the boat along, but there were spells when they could sit and sing while the boat beat its way up the river under sail. At last we reached these curious rocks sticking up out of the broad flood that swirls around them – black rocks, rounded and glistening like gigantic lumps of coal.

From my place here I can see our boat tied up to the bank far below; it is gaily bedecked with flags, and at the top of the mast one long pennon

with the star and crescent hangs limp in the lifeless air. On deck lies a dog, asleep, with lolling tongue. As far as I can see the Nubian crew, squatting on the shore, are still as busy as ever talking. Their voices do not reach me, but I can see their gesticulations. So dead black is their skin that they look as if they had been rubbed over with blacklead and then polished like a grate; their hair is glistening with castor oil. They talk and talk, but here there is silence except for the far-off sound of the water rushing, leaping and dashing amongst the rocks.

I have to shut my eyes at last because of the glare, and when I open them again it is to watch a beetle crawling over the glittering flakes of stone. It is a shiny and fantastic creature with glassy wings and a silver body spotted with bronze. It moves slowly among a host of ants that are hurrying in and out between the hot boulders. Idly I look at them and their settlement full of stirs; ant jostles ant in the narrow ways, and they are all black – as black as those Nubian boatmen down below. Here is a city of Ethiopians – a miniature city that with one brush of my hand I could sweep away. Ethiopia! How rich and hot the

name sounds; but it tells of a glory which is fled. . . .

Ethiopia lies there before me; on one side of the Nile its sand is ashen grey, on the other a tawny gold. And this terrible waterless desert stretches away eastward to the coast; beyond there heaves the Red Sea. Southward and eastward it shimmers in the heat-haze, and somewhere beyond the horizon there roam dapple giraffes – fairy-tale creatures with velvety skins and liquid eyes. I wonder, are they frightened of the lions? The Kings of Ethiopia used to hunt with lions. . . . Kings with lions at their side! Ethiopia, once great, your glory has indeed been swept away! Where are the emeralds and the gold, where are the gums, and resins, and fragrant woods that once you poured forth? How long ago is it since travelling companies of tall merchantmen brought their riches to Egypt over these blazing sands – their white ivory, white wool and white ostrich plumes, their ebony and slaves like ebony. Bunched feathers of bright colours, and small bewildered negro boys were offered to the great ladies of Thebes and Heliopolis.

But Ethiopia had her queens and cities too.

There, to the south, reigned dark queen after dark queen – Candace in all her splendour! there, too, Ptolemy had his emerald mines and there rose the great city of Meroë, with its ranks of pyramids, its huge ebony trees, its colonnades, its thousand artificers that 'were occupied in its fairs with emeralds, purple and embroidered work, fine linen and coral.' The tyrannous sun of noonday beat down on the crowded marts, on the rams and horses, and on the oxen with carved horns pulling carts along the white roads.

But in later years the sound of battle was heard in those streets; painted chariots with painted cases for javelins dashed by, and the end of it all was defeat. The inspired prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel came true, and at Meroë there was nothing left but 'the stones of emptiness'; it became 'a court for owls, where each satyr cries to its fellow.' Did the wolf of the evening roam there when the land was laid waste, when the highways were deserted, and even the Roman legions had gone?

And then time passed. The tide of conquerors swept by – Pharaohs, Assyrians and Persians withdrew from the land and Ethiopia

fell into quiet. The same hot sun rose and sank over the desert, the same black rocks and yellow sand-bars broke the swirl of the flowing Nile; but the tumult of life was elsewhere.

And so it went on until there was born a certain boat-builder. On the upper reaches of the river beyond Khartoum he lived in a grass hut. He was devout then; did anyone suspect, I wonder, during his quiet years of carpentering, that the man would come forth as a prophet and spread the frenzy of fanaticism over the whole land? For this was the conquering Mahdi who was to make Ethiopia glow again like a red meteor in the African night. The mad fury of war rose and fell, until, his baleful career ended, he died in his perfumed house at Khartoum.

How strange that it should be because of him that English soldiers have camped in this sweltering heat, and been begrimed by whirling sand-storms, men who walked as boys in the flowery meadows of England and men who loved the moist Scotch hills. How far those fields and those hills must have seemed to them here where there was fighting at places which sound as though they could never be cool, Firket, and Berber, and

Dongola. . . . The battalions march at night under the high white moon, the camel corps goes by in a cloud of dust, the white tents shine in the dry air, and before one of them stands Kitchener looking across the desert with that level look of his.

This time it is the Khalifa who is the enemy. The Dervishes come, a horde in fluttering garments across the scorched plain. Wild and cruel they come, thousand upon thousand, in gaily-patched jibbahs with their green and embroidered banners and the great black flag of the Khalifa held waving above the host. Amongst them ride the Emirs high on their fawn-coloured camels. The battle breaks. The battle goes against them, and the Khalifa with his lean and cunning face, he is caught at last! That famous saddle of mother-of-pearl and silver is empty now; he has dismounted and sits fierce and still unflinching on the white sheepskin he has spread out on the sand. With his chiefs about him he waits to be killed, and dies shot through again and again.

So the desert becomes empty and still once more; only in the silence the twisting sand-pillars

drive here and there across the plain, rising and subsiding in blind capricious violence; only the gazelles move lightly over the pale ground, and in the solitude of the night lions and young lions pace over the rocks with noiseless feet.

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10. THE WAY OF ALL FLESH A Novel
by Samuel Butler

¶ 'It drives one almost to despair of English Literature when one sees so extraordinary a study of English life as Butler's posthumous *Way of All Flesh* making so little impression. Really, the English do not deserve to have great men.' *George Bernard Shaw*

11. EREWHON A Satire
by Samuel Butler

¶ 'To lash the age, to ridicule vain pretension, to expose hypocrisy, to deride humbug in education, politics and religion, are tasks beyond most men's powers; but occasionally, very occasionally, a bit of genuine satire secures for itself more than a passing nod of recognition. *Erewhon* is such a satire. . . . The best of its kind since *Gulliver's Travels*.' *Augustine Birrell*

12. EREWHON REVISITED A Satire
by Samuel Butler

¶ 'He waged a sleepless war with the mental torpor of the prosperous, complacent England around him; a Swift with the soul of music in him, and completely sane; a liberator of humanity operating with the wit and malice and coolness of Mephistopheles.' *Manchester Guardian*

13. ADAM AND EVE AND PINCH ME Stories
by A. E. Coppard

¶ Mr. Coppard's implicit theme is the closeness of the spiritual world to the material; the strange, communicative sympathy which strikes through two temperaments and suddenly makes them one. He deals with those sudden impulses under which secrecy is broken down for a moment, and personality revealed as under a flash of spiritual lightning.

14. DUBLINERS A volume of Stories
by James Joyce

¶ A collection of fifteen short stories by the author of *Ulysses*. They are all of them brave, relentless, and sympathetic pictures of Dublin life; realistic, perhaps, but not crude; analytical, but not repugnant. No modern writer has greater significance than Mr. Joyce, whose conception and practice of the short story is certainly unique and certainly vital.

15. DOG AND DUCK
by Arthur Machen

¶ 'As a literary artist, Mr. Arthur Machen has few living equals, and that is very far indeed from being his only, or even his greatest, claim on the suffrages of English readers.' *Sunday Times*

16. KAI LUNG'S GOLDEN HOURS
by Ernest Bramah

¶ 'It is worthy of its forerunner. There is the same plan, exactitude, working-out and achievement; and therefore complete satisfaction in the reading.' *From the Preface by* HILAIRE BELLOC

17. ANGELS & MINISTERS, AND OTHER PLAYS
by Laurence Housman

Imaginary portraits of political characters done in dialogue—Queen Victoria, Disraeli, Gladstone, Parnell, Joseph Chamberlain, and Woodrow Wilson.

¶ 'It is all so good that one is tempted to congratulate Mr. Housman on a true masterpiece.' *Times*

18. THE WALLET OF KAI LUNG
by Ernest Bramah

¶ 'Something worth doing and done. . . . It was a thing intended, wrought out, completed and established. Therefore it was destined to endure, and, what is more important, it was a success.' *Hilaire Belloc*

19. TWILIGHT IN ITALY
by D. H. Lawrence

¶ This volume of travel vignettes in North Italy was first published in 1916. Since then Mr. Lawrence has increased the number of his admirers year by year. In *Twilight in Italy* they will find all the freshness and vigour of outlook which they have come to expect from its author.

20. THE DREAM A Novel
by H. G. Wells

¶ 'It is the richest, most generous and absorbing thing that Mr. Wells has given us for years and years.' *Daily News*
'I find this book as close to being magnificent as any book that I have ever read. It is full of inspiration and life.'
Daily Graphic

21. ROMAN PICTURES
by Percy Lubbock

¶ Pictures of life as it is lived—or has been or might be lived—among the pilgrims and colonists in Rome of more or less English speech.
'A book of whimsical originality and exquisite workmanship, and worthy of one of the best prose writers of our time.'
Sunday Times

22. CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN
by A. E. Coppard

¶ 'Genius is a hard-ridden word, and has been put by critics at many puny ditches, but Mr. Coppard sets up a fence worthy of its mettle. He shows that in hands like his the English language is as alive as ever, and that there are still infinite possibilities in the short story.' *Outlook*

23. MARIUS THE EPICUREAN
by Walter Pater

¶ Walter Pater was at the same time a scholar of wide sympathies and a master of the English language. In this, his best known work, he describes with rare delicacy of feeling and insight the religious and philosophic tendencies of the Roman Empire at the time of Antoninus Pius as they affected the mind and life of the story's hero.

24. THE WHITE SHIP Stories
by Aino Kallas
With an Introduction by JOHN GALSWORTHY

¶ 'The writer has an extraordinary sense of atmosphere.'
Times Literary Supplement

'Stories told convincingly and well, with a keen perception for natural beauty.' *Nation*

25. MULTITUDE AND SOLITUDE A Novel
by John Masefield

¶ 'As well conceived and done, as rich in observation of the world, as profound where it needs to be profound, as any novel of recent writing.' *Outlook*

'This is no common book. It is a book which not merely touches vital things. It is vital.' *Daily News*

26. SPRING SOWING Stories
by Liam O'Flaherty

¶ 'Nothing seems to escape Mr. O'Flaherty's eye; his brain turns all things to drama; and his vocabulary is like a river in spate. *Spring Sowing* is a book to buy, or to borrow, or, yes, to steal.' *Bookman*

27. WILLIAM A Novel
by E. H. Young

¶ 'An extraordinary good book, penetrating and beautiful.'
Allan Monkhouse

'All its characters are very real and alive, and William himself is a masterpiece.' *May Sinclair*

28. THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS
by Sarah Orne Jewett

¶ 'The young student of American literature in the far distant future will take up this book and say "a masterpiece!" as proudly as if he had made it. It will be a message in a universal language—the one message that even the scythe of Time spares.'
From the Preface by WILLA CATHER

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29. GRECIAN ITALY
by Henry James Forman

¶ 'It has been said that if you were shown Taormina in a vision you would not believe it. If the reader has been in Grecian Italy before he reads this book, the magic of its pages will revive old memories and induce a severe attack of nostalgia.' *From the Preface by* H. FESTING JONES

30. WUTHERING HEIGHTS
by Emily Brontë

¶ 'It is a very great book. You may read this grim story of lost and thwarted human creatures on a moor at any age and come under its sway.' *From the Introduction by* ROSE MACAULAY

31. ON A CHINESE SCREEN
by W. Somerset Maugham

¶ A collection of sketches of life in China. Mr. Somerset Maugham writes with equal certainty and vigour whether his characters are Chinese or European. There is a tenderness and humour about the whole book which makes the reader turn eagerly to the next page for more.

32. A FARMER'S LIFE
by George Bourne

¶ The life story of a tenant-farmer of fifty years ago in which the author of *The Bettesworth Book* and *The Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer* draws on his memory for a picture of the every-day life of his immediate forebears, the Smiths, farmers and handicraft men, who lived and died on the border of Surrey and Hampshire.

33. TWO PLAYS. *The Cherry Orchard & The Sea Gull*
by Anton Tchekoff. Translated by George Calderon

¶ Tchekoff had that fine comedic spirit which relishes the incongruity between the actual disorder of the world with the underlying order. He habitually mingled tragedy (which is life seen close at hand) with comedy (which is life seen at a distance). His plays are tragedies with the texture of comedy.

34. THE MONK AND THE HANGMAN'S DAUGHTER
by Ambrose Bierce

¶ 'They are stories which the discerning are certain to welcome. They are evidence of very unusual powers, and when once they have been read the reader will feel himself impelled to dig out more from the same pen.' *Westminster Gazette*

35. CAPTAIN MARGARET A Novel
by John Masefield

¶ 'His style is crisp, curt and vigorous. He has the Stevensonian sea-swagger, the Stevensonian sense of beauty and poetic spirit. Mr. Masefield's descriptions ring true and his characters carry conviction.' *The Observer*

36. BLUE WATER
by Arthur Sturges Hildebrand

¶ This book gives the real feeling of life on a small cruising yacht; the nights on deck with the sails against the sky, long fights with head winds by mountainous coasts to safety in forlorn little island ports, and constant adventure free from care.

37. STORIES FROM DE MAUPASSANT
Translated by Elizabeth Martindale

¶ 'His "story" engrosses the non-critical, it holds the critical too at the first reading. . . . That is the real test of art, and it is because of the inobtrusiveness of this workmanship, that for once the critic and the reader may join hands without awaiting the verdict of posterity.' *From the Introduction by* FORD MADOX FORD

38. WHILE THE BILLY BOILS First Series
by Henry Lawson

¶ These stories are written by the O. Henry of Australia. They tell of men and dogs, of cities and plains, of gullies and ridges, of sorrow and happiness, and of the fundamental goodness that is hidden in the most unpromising of human soil.

39. WHILE THE BILLY BOILS Second Series
by Henry Lawson

¶ Mr. Lawson has the uncanny knack of making the people he writes about almost violently alive. Whether he tells of jackeroos, bush children or drovers' wives, each one lingers in the memory long after we have closed the book.

41. IN MOROCCO
by Edith Wharton

¶ Morocco is a land of mists and mysteries, of trailing silver veils through which minarets, mighty towers, hot palm groves and Atlas snows peer and disappear at the will of the Atlantic cloud-drifts.

42. GLEANINGS IN BUDDHA-FIELDS
by Lafcadio Hearn

¶ A book which is readable from first page to last, and is full of suggestive thought, the essays on Japanese religious belief calling for special praise for the earnest spirit in which the subject is approached.

43. OUT OF THE EAST
by Lafcadio Hearn

¶ Mr. Hearn has written many books about Japan ; he is saturated with the essence of its beauty, and in this book the light and colour and movement of that land drips from his pen in every delicately conceived and finely written sentence.

44. KWAIDAN
by Lafcadio Hearn

¶ The marvellous tales which Mr. Hearn has told in this volume illustrate the wonder-living tendency of the Japanese. The stories are of goblins, fairies and sprites, with here and there an adventure into the field of unveiled supernaturalism.

45. THE CONQUERED
by Naomi Mitchison
A story of the Gauls under Cæsar

¶ 'With *The Conquered* Mrs. Mitchison establishes herself as the best, if not the only, English historical novelist now writing. It seems to me in many respects the most attractive and poignant historical novel I have ever read.' *New Statesman*

46. WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS
by Naomi Mitchison

Stories of the time when Rome was crumbling to ruin

¶ 'Interesting, delightful, and fresh as morning dew. The connoisseur in short stories will turn to some pages in this volume again and again with renewed relish.' *Times Literary Supplement*

47. THE FLYING BO'SUN
by Arthur Mason

¶ 'What makes the book remarkable is the imaginative power which has re-created these events so vividly that even the supernatural ones come with the shock and the conviction with which actual supernatural events might come.' *From the Introduction by* EDWIN MUIR

48. LATER DAYS
by W. H. Davies

A pendant to *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*

¶ 'The self-portrait is given with disarming, mysterious, and baffling directness, and the writing has the same disarmingness and simpleness.' *Observer*

49. THE EYES OF THE PANTHER Stories
by Ambrose Bierce

¶ It is said that these tales were originally rejected by virtually every publisher in the country. Bierce was a strange man; in 1914 at the age of seventy-one he set out for Mexico and has never been heard of since. His stories are as strange as his life, but this volume shows him as a master of his art.

50. IN DEFENCE OF WOMEN
by H. L. Mencken

¶ 'All I design by the book is to set down in more or less plain form certain ideas that practically every civilized man and woman holds *in petto*, but that have been concealed hitherto by the vast mass of sentimentalities swathing the whole woman question.' *From the Author's Introduction*

51. VIENNESE MEDLEY A Novel
by Edith O'Shaughnessy

¶ 'It is told with infinite tenderness, with many touches of grave or poignant humour, in a very beautiful book, which no lover of fiction should allow to pass unread. A book which sets its writer definitely in the first rank of living English novelists.' *Sunday Times*

52. PRECIOUS BANE A Novel
by Mary Webb

¶ 'She has a style of exquisite beauty; which yet has both force and restraint, simplicity and subtlety; she has fancy and wit, delicious humour and pathos. She sees and knows men aright as no other novelist does. She has, in short, genius.' *Mr. Edwin Pugh*

53. THE INFAMOUS JOHN FRIEND
by Mrs. R. S. Garnett

¶ This book, though in form an historical novel, claims to rank as a psychological study. It is an attempt to depict a character which, though destitute of the common virtues of every-day life, is gifted with qualities that compel love and admiration.

54. HORSES AND MEN
by Sherwood Anderson

¶ '*Horses and Men* confirms our indebtedness to the publishers who are introducing his work here. It has a unity beyond that of its constant Middle-west setting. A man of poetic vision, with an intimate knowledge of particular conditions of life, here looks out upon a world that seems singularly material only because he unflinchingly accepts its actualities.' *Morning Post*

55. SELECTED ESSAYS
by Samuel Butler

¶ This volume contains the following essays:

The Humour of Homer
Quis Desiderio . . .?
Ramblings in Cheapside
The Aunt, the Nieces, and the Dog
How to Make the Best of Life
The Sanctuary of Montrigone
A Medieval Girls' School
Art in the Valley of Saas
Thought and Language

56. A POET'S PILGRIMAGE
by W. H. Davies

¶ *A Poet's Pilgrimage* recounts the author's impressions of his native Wales on his return after many years' absence. He tells of a walking tour during which he stayed in cheap rooms and ate in the small wayside inns. The result is a vivid picture of the Welsh people, the towns and countryside.

57. GLIMPSES OF UNFAMILIAR JAPAN. First Series
by Lafcadio Hearn

¶ Most books written about Japan have been superficial sketches of a passing traveller. Of the inner life of the Japanese we know practically nothing, their religion, superstitions, ways of thought. Lafcadio Hearn reveals something of the people and their customs as they are.

58. GLIMPSES OF UNFAMILIAR JAPAN. Second Series
by Lafcadio Hearn

¶ Sketches by an acute observer and a master of English prose, of a Nation in transition—of the lingering remains of Old Japan, to-day only a memory, of its gardens, its beliefs, customs, gods and devils, of its wonderful kindliness and charm—and of the New Japan, struggling against odds towards new ideals.

59. THE TRAVELS OF MARCO POLO
Edited by Manuel Komroff

¶ When Marco Polo arrived at the court of the Great Khan, Pekin had just been rebuilt. Kublai Khan was at the height of his glory. Polo rose rapidly in favour and became governor of an important district. In this way he gained first-hand knowledge of a great civilization and described it with astounding accuracy and detail.

60. SELECTED PREJUDICES. Second Series
by H. L. Mencken

¶ 'What a master of the straight left in appreciation! Everybody who wishes to see how common sense about books and authors can be made exhilarating should acquire this delightful book.'
Morning Post

61. THE WORLD'S BACK DOORS
by Max Murray
With an introduction by HECTOR BOLITHO

¶ This book is not an account so much of places as of people. The journey round the world was begun with about enough money to buy one meal, and continued for 66,000 miles. There are periods as a longshore man and as a sailor, and a Chinese guard and a night watchman, and as a hobo.

62. THE EVOLUTION OF AN INTELLECTUAL
by J. Middleton Murry

¶ These essays were written during and immediately after the Great War. The author says that they record the painful stages by which he passed from the so-called intellectual state to the state of being what he now considers to be a reasonable man.

63. THE RENAISSANCE
by Walter Pater

¶ This English classic contains studies of those 'supreme artists,' Michelangelo and Da Vinci, and of Botticelli, Della Robia, Mirandola, and others, who 'have a distinct faculty of their own by which they convey to us a peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere.' There is no romance or subtlety in the work of these masters too fine for Pater to distinguish in superb English.

64. THE ADVENTURES OF A WANDERER
by Sydney Walter Powell

¶ Throwing up a position in the Civil Service in Natal because he preferred movement and freedom to monotony and security, the author started his wanderings by enlisting in an Indian Ambulance Corps in the South African War. Afterwards he wandered all over the world.

65. 'RACUNDRA'S' FIRST CRUISE
by Arthur Ransome

¶ This is the story of the building of an ideal yacht which would be a cruising boat that one man could manage if need be, but on which three people could live comfortably. The adventures of the cruise are skilfully and vividly told.

66. THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN
by Winwood Reade

¶ 'Few sketches of universal history by one single author have been written. One book that has influenced me very strongly is *The Martyrdom of Man*. This "dates," as people say nowadays, and it has a fine gloom of its own; but it is still an extraordinarily inspiring presentation of human history as one consistent process.' *H. G. Wells* in *The Outline of History*

67. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK RUTHERFORD
With an introduction by H. W. MASSINGHAM

¶ Because of its honesty, delicacy and simplicity of portraiture, this book has always had a curious grip upon the affections of its readers. An English Amiel, inheriting to his comfort an English Old Crome landscape, he freed and strengthened his own spirit as he will his reader's.

68. THE DELIVERANCE
by Mark Rutherford

¶ Once read, Hale White [Mark Rutherford] is never forgotten. But he is not yet approached through the highways of English letters. To the lover of his work, nothing can be more attractive than the pure and serene atmosphere of thought in which his art moves.

69. THE REVOLUTION IN TANNER'S LANE
by Mark Rutherford

¶ 'Since Bunyan, English Puritanism has produced one imaginative genius of the highest order. To my mind, our fiction contains no more perfectly drawn pictures of English life in its recurring emotional contrast of excitement and repose more valuable to the historian, or more stimulating to the imaginative reader.' *H. W. Massingham*

70. ASPECTS OF SCIENCE. First Series
by J. W. N. Sullivan

¶ Although they deal with different aspects of various scientific ideas, the papers which make up this volume do illustrate, more or less, one point of view. This book tries to show one or two of the many reasons why science may be interesting for people who are not specialists as well as for those who are.

71. MASTRO-DON GESUALDO
Giovanni Verga. Translated by D. H. Lawrence

¶ Verga, who died in 1922, is recognized as one of the greatest of Italian writers of fiction. He can claim a place beside Hardy and the Russians. 'It is a fine full tale, a fine, full picture of life, with a bold beauty of its own which Mr. Lawrence must have relished greatly as he translated it.' *Observer*

72. THE MISSES MALLETT
by E. H. Young

¶ The virtue of this quiet and accomplished piece of writing lies in its quality and in its character-drawing; to summarize it would be to give no idea of its charm. Neither realism nor romance, it is a book by a writer of insight and sensibility.

73. SELECTED ESSAYS. First Series
by Sir Edmund Gosse, C.B.

¶ 'The prose of Sir Edmund Gosse is as rich in the colour of young imagination as in the mellow harmony of judgment. Sir Edmund Gosse's literary kit-kats will continue to be read with avidity long after the greater part of the academic criticism of the century is swept away upon the lumber-heap.' *Daily Telegraph*

74. WHERE THE BLUE BEGINS
by Christopher Morley

¶ A delicious satirical fantasy, in which humanity wears a dog-collar.

'Mr. Morley is a master of consequent inconsequence. His humour and irony are excellent, and his satire is only the more salient for the delicate and ingenuous fantasy in which it is set.' *Manchester Guardian*

75. JAVA HEAD
by Joseph Hergesheimer

¶ The author has created a connoisseur's world of his own; a world of colourful bric-à-brac—of ships and rustling silks and old New England houses—a world in which the rarest and most perplexing of emotions are caught and expressed for the perceptible moment as in austerely delicate porcelain. *Java Head* is a novel of grave and lasting beauty.

76. CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN
by George Moore

¶ 'Mr. Moore, true to his period and to his genius, stripped himself of everything that might stand between him and the achievement of his artistic object. He does not ask you to admire this George Moore. He merely asks you to observe him beyond good and evil as a constant plucked from the bewildering flow of eternity.' *Humbert Wolfe*

77. THE BAZAAR. Stories
by Martin Armstrong

¶ 'These stories have considerable range of subject, but in general they are stay-at-home tales, depicting cloistered lives and delicate finely fibred minds. . . . Mr. Armstrong writes beautifully.' *Nation and Athenæum*

78. SIDE SHOWS. Essays
by J. B. Atkins
With an Introduction by JAMES BONE

¶ Mr. J. B. Atkins was war correspondent in four wars, the London editor of a great English paper, then Paris correspondent of another, and latterly the editor of the *Spectator*. His subjects in *Side Shows* are briefly London and the sea.

79. SHORT TALKS WITH THE DEAD
by Hilaire Belloc

¶ In these essays Mr. Belloc attains his usual high level of pungent and witty writing. The subjects vary widely and include an imaginary talk with the spirits of Charles I, the barber of Louis XIV, and Napoleon, Venice, fakes, eclipses, Byron, and the famous dissertation on the Nordic Man.

80. ORIENT EXPRESS
by John dos Passos

¶ This book will be read because, as well as being the temperature chart of an unfortunate sufferer from the travelling disease, it deals with places shaken by the heavy footsteps of History, manifesting itself as usual by plague, famine, murder, sudden death and depreciated currency. Underneath the book is an ode to railroad travel.

81. SELECTED ESSAYS. Second Series
by Sir Edmund Gosse, C.B.

¶ A second volume of essays personally chosen by Sir Edmund Gosse from the wide field of his literary work. One is delighted with the width of his appreciation which enables him to write with equal charm on *Wycherley* and on *How to Read the Bible*.

82. ON THE EVE
by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett

¶ In his characters is something of the width and depth which so astounds us in the creations of Shakespeare. *On the Eve* is a quiet work, yet over which the growing consciousness of coming events casts its heavy shadow. Turgenev, even as he sketched the ripening love of a young girl, has made us feel the dawning aspirations of a nation.

83. FATHERS AND CHILDREN
by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett

¶ 'As a piece of art *Fathers and Children* is the most powerful of all Turgenev's works. The figure of Bazarov is not only the political centre of the book, but a figure in which the eternal tragedy of man's impotence and insignificance is realized in scenes of a most ironical human drama.' *Edward Garnett*

84. SMOKE
by Ivan Turgenev. Translated by Constance Garnett

¶ In this novel Turgenev sees and reflects, even in the shifting phases of political life, that which is universal in human nature. His work is compassionate, beautiful, unique; in the sight of his fellow-craftsmen always marvellous and often perfect.

85. PORGY. A Tale
by du Bose Heyward

¶ This fascinating book gives a vivid and intimate insight into the lives of a group of American negroes, from whom Porgy stands out, rich in humour and tragedy. The author's description of a hurricane is reminiscent in its power.

86. FRANCE AND THE FRENCH
by Sisley Huddleston

¶ 'There has been nothing of its kind published since the War. His book is a repository of facts marshalled with judgment; as such it should assist in clearing away a whole maze of misconceptions and prejudices, and serve as a sort of pocket encyclopædia of modern France.' *Times Literary Supplement*

88. CLOUD CUCKOO LAND. A Novel of Sparta
by Naomi Mitchison

¶ 'Rich and frank in passions, and rich, too, in the detail which helps to make feigned life seem real.' *Times Literary Supplement*

89. A PRIVATE IN THE GUARDS
by Stephen Graham

¶ In his own experiences as a soldier Stephen Graham has conserved the half-forgotten emotions of a nation in arms. Above all he makes us feel the stark brutality and horror of actual war, the valour which is more than valour, and the disciplined endurance which is human and therefore the more terrifying.

90. THUNDER ON THE LEFT
by Christopher Morley

¶ 'It is personal to every reader, it will become for every one a reflection of himself. I fancy that here, as always where work is fine and true, the author has created something not as he would but as he must, and is here an interpreter of a world more wonderful than he himself knows.' *Hugh Walpole*

91. THE MOON AND SIXPENCE
by Somerset Maugham

¶ A remarkable picture of a genius.
'Mr. Maugham has given us a ruthless and penetrating study in personality with a savage truthfulness of delineation and an icy contempt for the heroic and the sentimental.' *The Times*

92. THE CASUARINA TREE
by W. Somerset Maugham

¶ Intensely dramatic stories in which the stain of the East falls deeply on the lives of English men and women. Mr. Maugham remains cruelly aloof from his characters. On passion and its culminating tragedy he looks with unmoved detachment, ringing the changes without comment and yet with little cynicism.

93. A POOR MAN'S HOUSE
by Stephen Reynolds

¶ Vivid and intimate pictures of a Devonshire fisherman's life. 'Compact, harmonious, without a single—I won't say false—but uncertain note, true in aim, sentiment and expression, precise and imaginative, never precious, but containing here and there an absolutely priceless phrase. . . .' *Joseph Conrad*

94. WILLIAM BLAKE
by Arthur Symons

¶ When Blake spoke the first word of the nineteenth century there was none to hear it; and now that his message has penetrated the world, and is slowly re-making it, few are conscious of the man who first voiced it. This lack of knowledge is remedied in Mr. Symons' work.

95. A LITERARY PILGRIM IN ENGLAND
by Edward Thomas

¶ A book about the homes and resorts of English writers, from John Aubrey, Cowper, Gilbert White, Cobbett, Wordsworth, Burns, Borrow and Lamb, to Swinburne, Stevenson, Meredith, W. H. Hudson and H. Belloc. Each chapter is a miniature biography and at the same time a picture of the man and his work and environment.

96. NAPOLEON: THE LAST PHASE
by The Earl of Rosebery

¶ Of books and memoirs about Napoleon there is indeed no end, but of the veracious books such as this there are remarkably few. It aims to penetrate the deliberate darkness which surrounds the last act of the Napoleonic drama.

97. THE POCKET BOOK OF POEMS AND SONGS FOR THE OPEN AIR
Compiled by Edward Thomas

¶ This anthology is meant to please those lovers of poetry and the country who like a book that can always lighten some of their burdens or give wings to their delight, whether in the open air by day, or under the roof at evening; in it is gathered much of the finest English poetry.

98. SAFETY PINS: ESSAYS
by Christopher Morley
With an Introduction by H. M. TOMLINSON

¶ Very many readers will be glad of the opportunity to meet Mr. Morley in the rôle of the gentle essayist. He is an author who is content to move among his fellows, to note, to reflect, and to write genially and urbanely; to love words for their sound as well as for their value in expression of thought.

99. THE BLACK SOUL: A Novel
by Liam O'Flaherty

¶ '*The Black Soul* overwhelms one like a storm. . . . Nothing like it has been written by any Irish writer.' "Æ" in *The Irish Statesman*

100. CHRISTINA ALBERTA'S FATHER: A Novel
by H. G. Wells

¶ 'At first reading the book is utterly beyond criticism; all the characters are delightfully genuine.' *Spectator*
'Brimming over with Wellsian insight, humour and invention. No one but Mr. Wells could have written the whole book and given it such verve and sparkle.' *Westminster Gazette*

102. THE GRUB STREET NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENTS
by J. C. Squire

¶ Stories of literary life, told with a breath of fantasy and gaily ironic humour. Each character lives, and is the more lively for its touch of caricature. From *The Man Who Kept a Diary* to *The Man Who Wrote Free Verse*, these tales constitute Mr. Squire's most delightful ventures in fiction; and the conception of the book itself is unique.

103. ORIENTAL ENCOUNTERS
by Marmaduke Pickthall

¶ In *Oriental Encounters*, Mr. Pickthall relives his earlier manhood's discovery of Arabia and sympathetic encounters with the Eastern mind. He is one of the few travellers who really bridges the racial gulf.

105. THE MOTHER: A Novel
by Grazia Deledda
With an introduction by D. H. LAWRENCE

¶ An unusual book, both in its story and its setting in a remote Sardinian hill village, half civilized and superstitious. The action of the story takes place so rapidly and the actual drama is so interwoven with the mental conflict, and all so forced by circumstances, that it is almost Greek in its simple and inevitable tragedy.

106. TRAVELLER'S JOY: An Anthology
by W. G. Waters

¶ This anthology has been selected for publication in the Travellers' Library from among the many collections of verse because of its suitability for the traveller, particularly the summer and autumn traveller, who would like to carry with him some store of literary provender.

107. SHIPMATES: Essays
by Felix Riesenberg

¶ A collection of intimate character portraits of men with whom the author has sailed on many voyages. The sequence of studies blends into a fascinating panorama of living characters.

108. THE CRICKET MATCH
by Hugh de Selincourt

¶ Through the medium of a cricket match the author endeavours to give a glimpse of life in a Sussex village. First we have a bird's-eye view at dawn of the village nestling under the Downs; then we see the players awaken in all the widely different circumstance of their various lives, pass the morning, assemble on the field, play their game, united for a few hours, as men should be, by a common purpose—and at night disperse.

109. RARE ADVENTURES AND PAINEFULL PEREGRINATIONS (1582–1645)
by William Lithgow
Edited, and with an Introduction by B. I. LAWRENCE

¶ This is the book of a seventeenth-century Scotchman who walked over the Levant, North Africa and most of Europe, including Spain, where he was tortured by the Inquisition. An unscrupulous man, full of curiosity, his comments are diverting and penetrating, his adventures remarkable.

110. THE END OF A CHAPTER
by Shane Leslie

¶ In this, his most famous book, Mr. Shane Leslie has preserved for future generations the essence of the pre-war epoch, its institutions and individuals. He writes of Eton, of the Empire, of Post-Victorianism, of the Politicians. . . . And whatever he touches upon, he brilliantly interprets.

111. SAILING ACROSS EUROPE
by Negley Farson
With an Introduction by FRANK MORLEY

¶ A voyage of six months in a ship, its one and only cabin measuring 8 feet by 6 feet, up the Rhine, down the Danube, passing from one to the other by the half-forgotten Ludwig's Canal. To think of and plan such a journey was a fine imaginative effort and to write about it interestingly is no mean accomplishment.

112. MEN, BOOKS AND BIRDS—Letters to a friend
by W. H. Hudson
With Notes, some Letters, and an Introduction by MORLEY ROBERTS

¶ An important collection of letters from the naturalist to his friend, literary executor and fellow-author, Morley Roberts, covering a period of twenty-five years.

113. PLAYS ACTING AND MUSIC
by Arthur Symons

¶ This book deals mainly with music and with the various arts of the stage. Mr. Arthur Symons shows how each art has its own laws, its own limits; these it is the business of the critic jealously to distinguish. Yet in the study of art as art, it should be his endeavour to master the universal science of beauty.

114. ITALIAN BACKGROUNDS
by Edith Wharton

¶ Mrs. Wharton's perception of beauty and her grace of writing are matters of general acceptance. Her book gives us pictures of mountains and rivers, monks, nuns and saints.

115. FLOWERS AND ELEPHANTS
by Constance Sitwell. With an Introduction by E. M. Forster

¶ Mrs. Sitwell has known India well, and has filled her pages with many vivid little pictures, and with sounds and scents. But it is the thread on which her impressions are strung that is so fascinating, a thread so delicate and rare that the slightest clumsiness in definition would snap it.

116. THE MOON OF THE CARIBBEES: and Other Plays of the Sea
by Eugene O'Neill. With an Introduction by St. John Ervine

¶ 'Mr. O'Neill is immeasurably the most interesting man of letters that America has produced since the death of Walt Whitman.' *From the Introduction.*

117. BETWEEN EARTH AND SKY. Stories of Gypsies
by Konrad Bercovici. With an Introduction by A. E. Coppard

¶ Konrad Bercovici, through his own association with gipsies, together with a magical intuition of their lives, is able to give us some unforgettable pictures of those wanderers who, having no home anywhere, are at home everywhere.

118. THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS
by George Douglas. With an Introduction by J. B. Priestley

¶ This powerful and moving story of life in a small Scots burgh is one of the grimmest studies of realism in all modern fiction. The author flashes a cold and remorseless searchlight upon the backbitings, jealousies, and intrigues of the townsfolk, and his story stands as a classic antidote to the sentimentalism of the kailyard school.

119. FRIDAY NIGHTS
by Edward Garnett

¶ Of *Friday Nights* a *Times* reviewer wrote: 'Mr. Garnett is "the critic as artist," sensitive alike to elemental nature and the subtlest human variations. His book sketches for us the possible outlines of a new humanism, a fresh valuation of both life and art.'

120. DIVERSIONS IN SICILY
by Henry Festing Jones

¶ Shortly before his sudden and unexpected death, Mr. Festing Jones chose out *Diversions in Sicily* for reprinting in the Travellers' Library from among his three books of mainly Sicilian sketches and studies. The publishers hope that the book, in this popular form, will make many new friends. These chapters, as well as any that he wrote, recapture the wisdom, charm, and humour of their author.

121. DAYS IN THE SUN: A Cricketer's Book.
by Neville Cardus ('Cricketer' of the *Manchester Guardian*).

122. COMBED OUT
by F. A. Voigt

¶ This account of life in the army in 1917–18 both at home and in France is written with a telling incisiveness. The author does not indulge in an unnecessary word, but packs in just the right details with an intensity of feeling that is infectious.

★

Note

The Travellers' Library is now published as a joint enterprise by Jonathan Cape Ltd. and William Heinemann Ltd. The new volumes announced here to appear during the spring of 1929 include those to be published by both firms. The series as a whole or any title in the series can be ordered through booksellers from either Jonathan Cape or William Heinemann. Booksellers' only care must be not to duplicate their orders.

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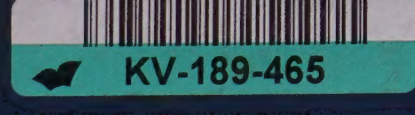
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